

WHEN THE MOON WAS RED

# AMAZING

SEPTEMBER

SCIENCE FICTION STORIES

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# AMAZING

SCIENCE FICTION STORIES

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SEPTEMBER 1960

Volume 34 Number 9

## SHORT STORIES

WHEN THE MOON WAS RED	
By Kate Wilhelm.....	6
TRAJECTORY TO TAURUS	
By Les Collins.....	39
THE AUTO HAWKS	
By Arthur Porges.....	57

## SERIAL

OMEGA! (Conclusion)	
By Robert Sheckley.....	64

## ARTICLE

MR. SCIENCE FICTION: A PROFILE OF HUGO GERNSBACH	
By Sam Moskowitz.....	22

## FEATURES

EDITORIAL .....	5
THE SPECTROSCOPE .....	135
...OR SO YOU SAY.....	137



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# E d i t o r i a l

LIKE an organism scurrying to adapt to a fast-changing environment, science-fiction magazines have been undergoing constant changes in the post-Sputnik world. Venerable titles have been metamorphosed. Prices, the number of pages, the frequency of publication have fluctuated. Many competitors have fallen by the wayside.

Through it all, *Amazing* has tried to steer a steady course; the only major change we have attempted was a general up-grading of the contents of the magazine. If we can judge by the response of our readers over the past two years, this change has been successful. During this period *Amazing* has published major works by major science-fiction writers—some of whom were making their first appearance in this magazine.

But now we have come to an important decision. In a world where the environment itself changes so quickly and so markedly, we, too, must make a carefully-planned break with the past. And so next month—the October issue—*Amazing Stories* will be a new and different magazine.



There will be significant changes in the appearance and contents of science-fiction's oldest magazine (34½ years old, by cracky!).

To begin with, we have redesigned the entire cover, from logotype to cover lines to artwork (*see left*). The cover illo is by Alex Schomberg, an artist

(Continued on page 145)

*In the shadow of the  
eclipse three people  
battled silently for  
the right of a boy to  
live his own life,  
dream his own  
dreams.*

ILLUSTRATOR  
BERNKLAU



**W**HEN the school officials first discussed Robbie with Shelley, she wasn't exactly surprised; pleased certainly, but with an inner feeling of vindication. Robbie wasn't quite eleven then and she had known for three or four years that he was mentally superior to his playmates and school friends. Not that he made any attempt to outstrip them in any way, it merely happened. When his cousin, Stevie, began collecting rocks, Robbie checked out half a dozen lapidary books and organized the collection systematically until Stevie gave it up in disgust. The collection was now quite valuable even though it did gather dust in the basement.

Frank had also got interested



# WHEN THE MOON WAS

By KATE WILHELM



RED

BernKlau -

in rocks, and had made show cases for them which he regularly—for a time—exhibited to all callers.

And the year Robbie had his eighth birthday party and had been given that hideous mud puppy. She had caught him carefully dissecting it with a razor blade on the kitchen table and drawing its insides on her monogrammed stationary. Frank had stayed the spanking she thought he deserved that time, and he had set up a regular operating table in the basement and proceeded to show Robbie how they had done it when he was in school. Robbie had sneaked away leaving him down there talking to the empty gray walls, looking foolishly at the mangled frog before him.

Robbie's stamp collection was under lock and key. "Good Lord, Shelley!" Frank had exploded when she protested, "the kid's stumbled across a sixty-five dollar stamp! First thing you know he'll trade it for a bb gun or something."

"He didn't stumble across it, Frank. He did some hard trading to get it," Shelley retorted.

"When he's older he'll enjoy it more, and appreciate it more. Just last night he knocked the whole book off the table when I tried to help him locate a violet Hamilton. He's too young for stuff like that."

Shelley looked at him calmly, "He didn't want any help. He didn't think he needed any."

"I still say he's too young. When he learns how to take care of it that's time enough."

Shelley had given it up at that. Robbie was hardier than she was; he could fight it his own way. She had watched him fighting it his own way for all of his ten years it seemed. He would start something, Frank would interfere, and he would wander away from it. While Frank was at his office, or on one of his business trips that kept him away nearly as much as he was there, Robbie's interests would reappear, still very much operative, but he filled in those other hours with other things. Robbie was very hardy.

Still it had come as a pleasure for the school authorities to recognize that he needed the challenge of the advanced program. He was not a genius, they were quick to declare, and that too she had known. But he was very intelligent, and under the present circumstances, it was felt that the more intellectually able youngsters should be given the opportunity to develop their abilities.

Frank's reaction had been typical, she thought wryly. He had bought a new encyclopedia set for seven hundred dollars,

had built book shelves in Robbie's room and crammed them with books the saleslady had assured him were fundamental for a genius. So far Robbie had by and large ignored them, preferring to check out his own selections of dogeared, smeary library books every Saturday. As often as not they included one horse story, one science fiction adventure and one that ranged from mythology through King Arthur, poetry, riddles or puns. Very bad puns that sent him into howls of laughter. He never checked more than three, and never returned one unread. He could lie across his bed immersed in the world of print for hours. Or in the living room oblivious of the television and of Beatrice's attempts to draw him into a game. Beatrice adored him, annoyed and pestered him, and at times seemed to be his main source of amusement. Robbie was good to her and his teasing was humorous rather than malicious. But most often he appeared unaware of her and his gleaming black hair tumbled on his forehead as the greater part of him departed through the gate of words leaving the handsome well-built body that no one could distract.

Shelley half listened to Beatrice sounding out the words in her first grade reader, and really listened to the sounds emanating

from the basement. "What dear?" she asked at the impatient tug on her arm. "'Pleasant'" she read and Beatrice continued chanting the adventures of Dick and Jane.

What could he be doing? Shelley wondered as she absently corrected Beatrice. He had taken his old record player and the alarm clock from his room and disappeared to the basement immediately after dinner. Finally it was time for Beatrice's bath and bed, and she started down the stairs. Robbie met her at the bottom, grinning happily.

"Finished, Robbie?" Shelley hid the disappointment and started to retrace her steps.

He hesitated only a moment and then asked shyly, "Want to see what I'm doing?"

Shelley followed him to the workshop area and watched as he plugged in the record player. "I fixed it so it only makes fifteen revolutions a minute, and I took out the spindle. But I can put it back and speed it up again," he added hurriedly.

"What's it for, Robbie? The records won't play that slowly, will they?"

"No, I'm going to grind a mirror for a telescope on it. You have to make a parabolic curve in the mirror and the book said to put the tool on a barrel and keep walking around it while you

grind, but I couldn't find a barrel anywhere so I thought this would give the same evenness."

"A telescope!" Shelley's mind flashed a picture of the observatory at that mountain in California and she shuddered involuntarily. "A telescope," she repeated weakly.

"Yes. I used my Christmas money for the kit. Ten dollars for the mirror blank and the tool and the pitch and all the grits and rouge. That's all right, isn't it? You said I could do anything I wanted to with it." His eyes, so deep a blue that they appeared black, fixed on her intently.

"But, Robbie, why didn't you mention it? When did you order it?"

"Last week," he said and became interested in the insulation of the extension cord he had connected to the record player. "I just forgot to say anything I guess." His gaze shifted and concentrated on his toes which immediately began to wiggle.

Shelley wanted to hug him to ease the ache that suddenly made her blink hard. Instead she said casually, "I suppose you have the instructions and books and everything in school, don't you?" He nodded without speaking and she added thoughtfully, "You know, your father will be gone the last two weeks of February.

What a nice surprise this would be for him to find finished when he gets home then."

Robbie's quick look of gratitude erased any guilt she may have felt and she continued, "Why don't you put off your homework until after dinner for the next week or so and you could spend some time down here after you get home from school every day. You won't be in your father's way if he wants to do anything down here that way." His smile of relief had to substitute for the kiss she halfway expected, and she reflected again on how fast he was leaving childhood behind.

They moved the record player to the table by her washer and covered it with an old sheet before they went upstairs, and when Frank returned from his bowling league they were in the living room watching television.

The grinding was slower than Shelley had thought possible and several times she actually bit her tongue to keep from volunteering to help. Robbie stood over the revolving turntable rubbing the mirror blank back and forth over the protesting grit on the face of the tool until she felt she could cry for him. Patiently he explained that it would be a six-inch Newtonian type with a focal length of forty-eight inches, if all went well. He would need a tube, but he had located a source,

if she could get it in the car for him—the man said they couldn't deliver just one aluminum tube. And he had the lenses for the eyepiece, but someday he'd like to get a Barlow lens. He hadn't figured out the clock drive for the mount, but that would come later after the telescope was finished. The mounting was the least important part of it because it could be changed any time, but the mirror, that was different. It had to be right the first time, or all the work was for nothing. Shelley listened and made sounds without meaning, feeling awed and not a little frightened by this serious faced child of hers.

Beatrice was asleep and Frank still gone when Robbie called her to see the last flame test before he started the fine polishing of the mirror. She hurried down the stairs feeling almost as much excitement as there was in his voice.

"It's really working, Mom. Look!" The basement was in darkness but for the candle he held high for her. The mirror sat on edge, wedged by books so that it couldn't roll, and back from it about six feet stood Robbie holding the candle. It was like an ancient, and slightly illicit rite of some sort, Shelley thought irrationally. "Watch," Robbie commanded.

He stooped on his haunches and moved the candle back and forth slowly until he was satisfied and then called her to kneel and look. "See," he said, "it fills the face of the mirror. One bright glob of light. Now watch." He moved the candle back perhaps an inch and it was reflected back to them inverted, a clear cut flame burning upside down. "Six feet!" he said jubilantly. "Boy! the books says that's good! It will come down another foot during the polishing."

"There's more?" Shelley asked as she straightened above the boy.

"Sure," Robbie replied quickly. "You've got to polish almost as long as the grinding took in the first place. That completes the correct curve while it polishes. Then you silver it."

"How?" Shelley asked, forcing herself to sit in the chair and merely watch as he reverently lifted the mirror and replaced it in the special carton he had devised to keep it from dust, and Beatrice.

"Well," he admitted, "I won't do that part. Mr. Lindstrom said he could do it for me if I wanted him to."

"Oh, Mr. Lindstrom knows about it already." Shelley wished the words back before she finished them and she watched the guilty look flicker across Rob-

bie's face. "Is he interested in astronomy?"

"Sure he is. He said if I hit a snag to give him a ring, and when I'm ready to silver it to bring it over." Mr. Lindstrom was his science teacher. There had been a period of several weeks when his name had cropped up every third sentence Robbie uttered until one night Frank had erupted.

"My God, what is this Lindstrom character? Some sort of high priest or something? If he's so good what's he doing stuck away teaching kids, why isn't he making a decent living like other men doing men's work?"

"Frank!" Shelley had exclaimed, "Stop that. Mr. Lindstrom is completely devoted to teaching. We're lucky to have him."

"Maybe," Frank said with his mouth full of blackberry pie, "but the way I heard it, a man takes up teaching after he's failed at everything else."

Robbie hadn't said another word, hadn't even given his father a reproachful glance, but somehow he gave Shelley the feeling that he had gathered himself in, had tested his muscles and, finding them insufficient had decided to wait. That was the last time until now that he had even spoken Lindstrom's name.

"Do you have any cheese

cloth?" Robbie asked abruptly, his attempt to change the subject painfully apparent even to him.

"I think so," Shelley said.

"Would you do something for me?"

Shelley mixed the jeweler's rouge with the correct amount of water and strained it through five thicknesses of cheesecloth as he directed while he carefully cleaned off the thick glass tool in a bucket of hot sudsy water. He vacuumed the area fastidiously and wrapped his rags and old papers he used under the record player in newspaper. Feeling perplexed and stupid Shelley watched without questioning him. Only after the table top and surrounding space was spotless did he inform her of the next step.

"I had to make sure none of the carborundum grit is around so it won't get on the mirror and scratch it. Now I have to melt the pitch and make what the book calls a pitch lap," he told her while he broke the pitch into a coffee can. "I have to pour the hot pitch on the tool and when it starts to get a little cool I put the mirror on it to shape it to the curve. That's why I needed the rouge now. It keeps the mirror from sticking to the pitch."

Shelley watched him anxiously as he stirred the hot pitch melting in the can. She wanted to

say, be careful, darling, hurry. Your father is coming home tomorrow and he'll be home for the rest of the week and all week-end. Not again, she prayed, please not again. It isn't fair to Robbie. Absently he picked at his nose as he stirred and she thought, he's so young. Too young to have to cope with it yet. They heard the footsteps overhead at the same time and Robbie turned suddenly stricken eyes to her as the voice called, "Hey, where's everybody? What is burning?"

Shelley ran across the basement to the stairs but Frank was already halfway down. "Confucious say," he boomed, "man who comes home early must be prepared to find wife unprepared. But he didn't say she'd be trying to burn down the house. What's going on?"

"Frank, you're early. A whole day. Come on, let's find something to eat." Shelley tried to plant herself between him and Robbie, but his eyes swept over her head and he laughed.

"Hi, son," he yelled jovially. "Ol' Dad's back from the battles of commerce. What's cooking?" He laughed heartily and enwrapped Shelley in one arm as he crossed to the camp stove Robbie was using. "What's that?"

"Pitch," Robbie said in a small voice not looking up from it.

"For God's sake, Shelley! Don't you know that stuff's dangerous to mess with!" He drew away from Shelley who caught at his arm, pulled it free without another glance at her. "Back up, son, and let Dad have a crack at it. What's it for?"

"Frank," Shelley said desperately, "he's being careful. Come on up and tell me about the trip."

"Later," Frank said absently paying no attention to her. "What's all that?" he asked pointing toward the mirror and the turntable.

Shelley walked up the stairs with leaden feet. She tried not to listen to Robbie's monosyllabic answers to Frank's flow of questions and finally with the closing of the door, she no longer heard the words, but the echo of that deflated voice answering so low remained with her. She sat at the table twisting her rings staring at the wall clock until they came up.

"You'd better get ready for bed, Robbie?" she said, avoiding his eye. "It's ten."

"Let's see now," Frank was saying unaware of the silence of the boy, "I'll be off until Monday. Five days. I'll get the tube sprayed with black tomorrow and while it's drying I'll run up to the university and see if any of the professors know anything about assembling it and getting

it finished. Ought to be able to get hold of a good eyepiece in town."

"Frank," Shelley said quietly after Robbie had gone to bed and they were finishing sandwiches and coffee, "why don't you let him finish it? He's worked so hard on it."

Frank looked up from the instructions he was poring over. "You bet he has. Great kid, isn't he! Who else has a kid who'd think of building his own telescope? Boy, I'm telling you, he's some kid!" Frank was district sales manager for the entire mid-western block of states. He was a large man, dark and quite handsome, although starting to put on excess weight.

Shelley looked at him thinking, he's stupid, but she denied it as quickly as the idea came. Not stupid, simple. He continued to be a salesman in his own home unmindful of the fact that his family hadn't been buying for years. He believed Robbie could do no wrong but that also he could do no right, without his, Frank's, help. She knew he saw himself as Robbie's only guide and idol and in turn the boy's most trivial utterances became gospel for him. She had hoped the passage of time and Robbie's constant growth of interests would by sheer massive being tend to wear down Frank's overpowering interference. But

Frank was an intelligent man and for his son he was quite willing to broaden his own scope by studying and by seeking help from experts in order to stay in the game. He was intelligent, Shelley reminded herself. He could be made to understand and see what he was doing.

"Frank," she said, "Just try to see it from his viewpoint. He wants to do it by himself. If he needs help, he'll ask for it."

"What do you mean? You know we always do things like that together. That's what's wrong with most kids, they don't have a father who's interested enough to go to a little bit of trouble for them. But, I tell you, Robbie's going to amount to something one of these days, and I'll see to it that when he gets a bug on something, he'll know he isn't alone. No sir, he knows he can count on his old man up to the end."

He stayed up for hours after Shelley went to bed reading the books Robbie had collected on telescopes and astronomy. The next day he sent a special delivery order for an equatorial mount, precision clock drive and tripod, to be delivered airmail. He located a camera that could be clamped to the eyepiece and spent several hours with the photographer who taught him how to use it.

"I know why he couldn't wait until I got home to get started on it," he explained to Shelley. "He wanted it ready in time for the eclipse of the moon next month. Boy, will I surprise him. I can't wait to see his face."

The telescope was completed and standing in the backyard two weeks later. Robbie had become withdrawn and subdued and refused to pose beside it for news photographers when they came to do a story about him and it. He didn't actually refuse, Shelley told herself; he just forgot to be home when they said they'd come. They settled for a picture of the telescope and an old snapshot of him. It was in the Sunday supplement. Frank ordered two dozen copies and mailed them to his business friends.

"Mom," Robbie said hesitantly the afternoon of the eclipse, if he falls asleep before time, do you think he'll wake up?"

Shelley shook her head not trusting her voice for a moment. Then she said firmly, "I know he won't. We'll be quiet."

Robbie ducked his head back to his book without speaking again, but she knew he wasn't reading it. If only she could hold him on her lap again, she thought, or even just hold him. She settled for an affectionate rubdown of his head and he grinned as if he understood.

Robbie went to bed early, before nine, with his clock set to awaken him at twelve-thirty. He had laid out his lined jeans and a woolen shirt and his boots were standing at the back door, for the ground was still covered with the last snowfall.

Shelley read for two hours, pretending to be too engrossed in her book to answer Frank when he spoke. Occasionally she glanced at him and by eleven-thirty she thought he was going to fall asleep after all, however, he got up briskly and announced that he was going to make coffee.

Shelley followed him to the kitchen. "Frank," she said quietly, "will you please go on to bed and let him do it alone."

Frank turned to face her and an ugly frown passed over his features to be lost again in his perpetual bland half smile. "Honey, you're the one who should go to bed. You don't care about getting out in that snow."

"I don't intend to get out in it more than a minute, unless Robbie wants me to. That's beside the point."

"O.K., Shelley, let's get it out in the open. Just what is the point? For weeks you've been needling me about getting out of Robbie's way, and from where I stand I can't see that I'm in his way." Frank sat down at the table and lighted a cigarette,

squinting a bit when the smoke curled up around his eyes. "Well," he prompted when Shelley remained quiet.

"Frank, don't you honestly see what it is you do? Every time he gets absorbed in something you take it from him and finish it yourself. It isn't his if you do it for him, and he resents it."

Frank was slowly shaking his head before she finished speaking and methodically he stubbed out the cigarette. "Shelley, baby, that isn't it at all," he said oddly indulgent. "I've suspected it for a long time, and it's getting more and more obvious. You're jealous of me with the boy, aren't you? Don't you see there's no need for it. I love you more . . . This has nothing . . ."

"Frank!" she burst in angrily, "how dare you talk to me like that, as if I hadn't known about you and the others for years. I'm not concerned with what you do any longer. My only worry is for Robbie. I watched him with this telescope while you were gone. He's never been so excited about anything in his life. His eyes danced and he couldn't wait to get home and get to work on it; he'd run all the way from the bus stop and he brought home all his books and talked about it incessantly. Then you came home and took over. Is he excited now? Have you heard him say one

word about it? He never even mentions it any more."

"So that's it!" Frank said and his voice was mean. "You just don't want me around at all. You want him all to yourself, don't you. I bet you had a good time trying to turn him against me while I was gone. By God, I should have seen it a long time ago." He jumped up from the chair and clutched at his hair as he did when angered. "Every time I come home he's a little more withdrawn. Oh, you've done a hell of a job on the kid. You must spend hours and hours brainwashing him to turn him against me. I can imagine the kind of stuff you must be filling his head with. But no more!" He was several feet from her as he spat out the words, and with each word he seemed to come closer and closer until his face was inches from her. "You hear me? No more. He's my kid and you can't split us up like that!"

Shelley stared unbelievably at him and took a backward step and then another away from his large body crowding against her. "You know that isn't true," she whispered feeling suddenly very cold and afraid, "I don't want to come between you. I just want you to see what happens every time he gets interested in something . . ."

"Stay out of my way, Shelley." Frank met her eyes evenly and

repeated, "Stay out of the way. You're not interested in what he does, but don't try to interfere with me. I know you can't stand me any more. By Heaven, you don't even try to pretend. That's O.K. by me. But just stay out of my way! I won't let you turn him into a mama's boy and I won't let you get between us. He's going to have things that are good, not some cheap junk that he scrounges around for. I can afford the best for him, and by God, he'll get it. If you don't like it, don't look—or get out."

He turned from her and savagely yanked a cup and caucer from the cabinet. Shelley left the kitchen fighting off nausea and faintness, afraid of the full-blown hatred she felt for him that must have lain within her, dormant, unrecognized for a long time. She crossed the dining room and as she entered the living room she thought she caught a flicker of movement in the hallway leading to Robbie's room. "Dear God," she breathed, "let him be asleep. Please . . ."

At two o'clock Shelley made hot chocolate for them. She pulled on her boots and fastened the hood of her car coat tight around her neck and carried the thick mugs, steaming in the fifteen degree temperature, out to the back of their yard where they were. She was walking carefully,

feeling her way through the almost knee deep snow, and without realizing it she was as silent as the night itself. Overhead the moon had turned into a ghastly dark brick-red ball and all about it the stars had come out once more. It had been brilliant out in the gleaming snow earlier, but now deep shadows merged with the bushes and flowed down into the ground and the effect was weird and unpleasant. She paused to take a look at the moon away from the lights of the house and before she moved again, she caught Frank's voice, urgent, spilling out words.

"You will love it, Robbie. We'll go up to Palomar together and see how real astronomers study eclipses and things. And we'll go to Disneyland every Sunday until you yell uncle. You've never even seen the ocean. Wait till you see, just wait till you see. And there are mountains just an hour's drive away, and the desert. Everything in one state."

"No!" the word formed in her throat and some of the chocolate spilled and ran down her leg making her jerk and spill more. Matter of factly she told herself, "I'll kill him before I'll let him take Robbie away." She started walking again and called out, "Hey, fellows, hot chocolate! Any takers?"

They drank the chocolate, both silent and strained with her



presence. Frank had been at the finder scope operating the camera and Robbie had field glasses trained on the moon when she joined them. He handed them over when he took the mug.

"It must be nearly over," Shelley said after one brief look. She didn't like the moon hidden and dark in the shadow.

"It isn't fully covered by the umbra yet," Robbie said. "That's still part of the penumbra. It'll get a lot darker. That's what the book says."

Frank chuckled. "And if the book says so, it's so, isn't it, pal?" He handed his mug back to Shelley. "We've been talking about some of the big observatories like Palomar, haven't we? We're going to see them all one of these days."

Shelley ignored the taunt, removed her glove and held her hand to Robbie's face for a moment. "Are you warm enough, honey? It's terribly cold out here." His face felt hotter than her hand.

"I'm O.K., Mom. I won't wait until it comes out of the shadow, just until totality. O.K.? That's not long."

"O.K. I'll have more chocolate waiting." She left them, the boy with the field glasses pointed toward the unfamiliar red moon and the man bending over the finder, clicking the camera button now and then. Back in the house she stood in the bedroom looking out the window. Very faintly she could still see them in the same positions as if they were carved and only moved when she approached. Beyond them, slightly behind them, the woods rose darkly and off to the right of them Harrison's house lay dark and still in the morning hours. She'd put the hot water bottle in with Robbie when he went to bed, she thought. He must be cold. There was a movement at the telescope and she turned to see them both running for the house. She met them at the back door and was nearly swept along with them.

"My gun, where is it?" Frank shouted and pounded down the basement stairs.

Robbie was dialing the phone with stiff uncooperative fingers. Frank returned jamming shells into the shotgun. "Put down that telephone! I said you are not to call Lindstrom!" he yelled at the boy.

"But he'd know what to do!"

Robbie cried and continued working with the dial.

Frank nearly knocked him down as he shoved him away from the wall phone. "I know what to do, too!" he said harshly and ran out the door calling over his shoulder. "Call the police and tell them."

Shelley felt as though she were in a swiftly moving dream where she couldn't make herself heard or understood as she tried to stop Frank and then tried to get Robbie to tell her what was wrong. Now she reached for and caught Robbie as he started to follow after Frank, but he only pushed the door shut after he looked out. "For heaven's sake, Robbie, what is it?" she cried.

His face was hot and feverish looking there was an odd fixed look in his eyes that didn't match the excitement he had shown only a moment before. Now he cocked his head as if listening, and slowly he appeared to become aware of Shelley shaking him. "He said he saw a spaceship or a flying saucer or something landing in the woods. He said now would be a perfect time for one, while everyone is either asleep or looking at the moon and they wouldn't be likely to notice something like that coming down. He said I should call the police and tell them. Do you think so?"

"Robbie," Shelley cried helplessly, "what are you talking about? Frank didn't see anything in the woods. I was looking all the time and there wasn't anything. Not a light or a movement or anything."

"I know it," he said with a tight little smile. "I'd better not say what he said to say. I'll tell them that he saw something and thinks they should investigate." The fixed look had returned to his eyes and Shelley's hands dropped from his shoulders letting him go. She watched while an anxiety grew and became almost uncontrollable. What was happening? Robbie spoke quietly into the phone and then held it out to her. "They want my mother or someone."

Shelley listened to the cool voice and answered it, "Yes, he took his gun and headed for the woods. I don't know what he saw." She told them where and hung up. Robbie was walking away from her toward the bedroom and she caught him and spun him around. "Tell me what happened out there, Robbie."

He patted her hand on his shoulder and said, "Let's see if we can see anything from the window." His boots trailed melting snow as he walked, and again she felt a fear forcing her not to speak again yet. He walked stiffly as if unaware of what he was

doing, as if his mind were far away.

At the window they stood side by side and strained to see what was happening. Nothing moved outside and it was darker than it had been. What had he called it? The umbra must be passing over the face of the moon. In the sullen red light that wasn't light at all they could see nothing. Suddenly Robbie spoke and his voice sounded very remote, as distant and cold as the red moon itself. "There was a round ship with glowing circular portholes all around it. It came down without any noise and landed behind the stand of pines. I said I'd get hold of Mr. Lindstrom and Dad began yelling that he'd go and see what it was and for me not to call in that flea brain. He thought he might need the gun." He stopped and his hand clenched hard on hers, squeezing tightly.

"Robbie! What is it? What's wrong?" Shelley cried and abruptly the pressure eased and then she could hear the sound of guns and faintly, dimly, a scream of pain and fear. Without a sound Robbie fell to the floor at her side.

When the police came Shelley was rubbing his feet and hands alternately. She had wrestled him out of the heavy outer clothing and had managed to get him into his bed, but still he lay inert and limp, deeply unconscious.

"I'm sorry, ma'm, but we had to do it," the uniformed man said in a strained, shocked voice. "Your husband was yelling and shooting. I'm sorry, but he would have killed us both." Shelley could only stare in horror and he stood twisting his hat looking everywhere but directly at her. Before the silence became unbreakable he replaced his hat and reached for the door. "You stay here with the boy, ma'm. They'll send an ambulance and a doctor and I'll tell him to come over directly. We won't need him out there."

Shelley mumbled something and went back to Robbie. She sat on the side of his bed and rubbed his hands watching his chest rise and fall as he slept the deep sleep of the completely exhausted. Her eyes passed from his flushed face to the signs that covered one wall, signs and pictures. There it was, the circular saucer with the round portholes.

It was the cover of a magazine he had saved. And below it the crazy sign that said, 'Plan Ahead' and ran out of space for all the letters. And the one that said, 'There Is No Problem The Mind Can't Solve.'

She could picture vividly what had happened. What must have happened. It would take only a suggestion from Robbie and Frank would have to believe a ship had landed. And by mentioning Lindstrom's name Frank's decision to investigate had been assured. Thinking spacemen were there, probably terrified, he had shot at the first thing that moved, the county police.

Why had Robbie fainted before the shots? How could he have been so sure the shots would occur? She shuddered as her restless gaze roamed the room again and stopped on the sign that said, 'Genius At Work.'

**THE END**



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# *Mr. Science Fiction:*

## A Profile Of

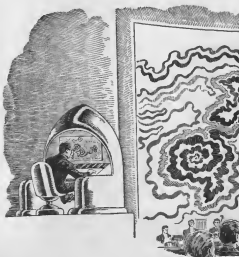
# HUGO GERNSBACK

By  
SAM MOSKOWITZ

THE most important event in the entire history of science fiction was undoubtedly the appearance of *AMAZING STORIES* on the newsstands of America, April 5, 1926. The initial issue, dated April, 1926, was the world's first science fiction magazine. Its publisher was Hugo Gernsback. In an editorial introducing that publishing innovation to the American public Gernsback wrote: "*AMAZING STORIES* is a *new* kind of fiction magazine! It is entirely new—entirely different — something that has never been done before in this country. Therefore, *AMAZING STORIES* deserves your attention and interest."

There had been nothing remotely approximating a science fiction publication previously. *THE THRILL BOOK*, the magazine Harold Hersey edited for Street and Smith in 1919, has errone-

ILLUSTRATOR FINLAY



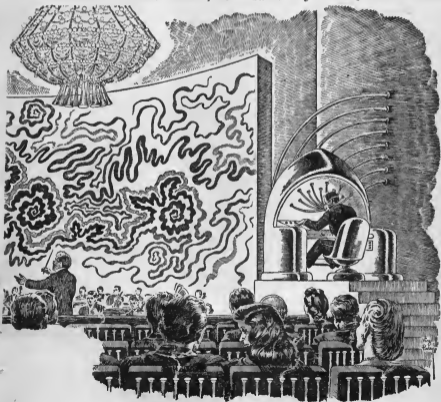
Odorama, one of many extraordinary Gernsback predictions made as far back as 1912.

ously been referred to as a science fiction magazine. The truth was that though Hersey seriously considered making it just that, he was reluctant to take the gamble. Instead, he ran a pot-pourri of adventure, off-trail, weird and fantasy tales with only about a half-dozen science fiction yarns sprinkled through the magazine's brief 16-issue existence.

Writing his memoirs, *Looking Backward Into the Future*, for

GOLDEN ATOM MAGAZINE in 1953, Hersey said: "It was too late to rectify an error that the brilliant Hugo Gernsback was not to commit when he launched AMAZING STORIES seven years later. Gernsback had the courage and vision to set a pattern from the very start that was to lead to success."

The pattern Hersey referred to was also clearly expounded in Gernsback's first editorial which said: "By 'scientifiction' I mean



*the Jules Verne, H. G. Wells, and Edgar Allan Poe type of story—a charming romance intermingled with scientific fact and prophetic vision.”*

There was no equivocation. No indefiniteness. Gernsback had clearly and unmistakably defined the nature of the stories his magazine would publish. The very first issue corroborated him, for it did contain stories by the two greatest, nineteenth-century masters of the art—Edgar Allan Poe, and Jules Verne, and a story by the H. G. Wells of *The Time Machine*, *War of the Worlds* and *The Invisible Man*, as distinct from the sociologically-minded H. G. Wells of a later period.

More than that, Gernsback was determined from the first to stress literary quality. “Many great science stories destined to be of an historical interest are still being written,” he affirmed, “and AMAZING STORIES will be the medium through which such stories will come to you. Posterity will point to them as having blazed a new trail, not only in literature and fiction, but in progress as well.”

Gernsback gave his magazine a distinctive format by producing it letter-size and printing on paper-stock so heavy that its 96 pages had a front-to-back thickness of more than half an inch. As managing editor, he selected

Dr. T. O'Connor Sloane, a distinguished scholar 75 years of age, who was an inventor, science writer and former professor and son-in-law of Thomas A. Edison.

Sloane's role was not to select stories, but to check on the accuracy of the science, handle the mechanics of expediting copy to the printers, order cuts, and generally coordinate the publication's functions. His title was changed to associate editor with the second issue of the magazine.

The man Gernsback leaned on most heavily for the selection of stories was C. A. Brandt. Gernsback learned of Brandt from a second-hand book dealer, who assured him that his German-born chemist was the greatest living authority in the world on science fiction. This statement was no exaggeration. Brandt, who among his other accomplishments was responsible for the introduction of calculating machines to America, possessed a fabulous library of science fiction and fantasy, including works in the German, French and Scandinavian languages.

Besides reading and passing on new stories for AMAZING STORIES in a first reader capacity he rendered invaluable service in suggesting reprints from his voluminous collection. He also translated some foreign works into English for the magazine,

including Curt Siodmak's *The Egg from Lake Tanganyika* and *The Malignant Flower* by Anthos. A second "literary" editor, Wilbur C. Whitehead, a well-known auction bridge expert of the twenties, whose avocation was science fiction, was added to the staff to help edit manuscripts.

Gernsback himself made the final decision on all manuscripts, wrote the editorials, the majority of the blurbs for the stories and selected the scenes to be used for cover and interior illustrations.

In the realm of art work, the magazine's most vital asset was the cover and interior illustrations of Austrian-born artist, Frank R. Paul, whose brilliant imaginative gifts captured the essence of science fiction in a manner never equalled before or surpassed since. Frank R. Paul's ability to project the theme of the magazine to the public in a pictorial way was an important factor in the almost instantaneous success of the publication.

Previous to the arrival of *AMAZING STORIES* on the publishing scene, there were only three important periodical sources of science fiction. They were the great weekly *ARGOSY*, Farnsworth Wright's brilliantly edited *WEIRD TALES* and Gernsback's own popular-science monthly, *SCIENCE AND INVENTION*.

Gernsback took from *ARGOSY* the outstanding authors George Allan England, Austin Hall, A Merritt, Edgar Rice Burroughs, Murray Leinster and Ray Cummings. From *WEIRD TALES* he borrowed H. P. Lovecraft, Otis Adelbert Kline, J. Schlossel, Francis Flagg and Clare Winger Harris. *SCIENCE AND INVENTION* produced Ellis Parker Butler, Clement Fézandié, Jacques Morgan and his own fiction.

Nor were the classics ignored. To Verne, Wells and Poe were added the names of Fitz-James O'Brien, Garrett P. Serviss, and even such pieces of historical interest as Richard Adams Locke's *Moon Hoax*, which hoodwinked the world almost a century earlier.

The precise publishing generalship with which Hugo Gernsback at one stroke established what he then termed "scientifiction" as a direct part of world literature, spotlighted attention on the fact that here was a man whose ability to convert imagination into reality transcended the bounds of what is generally referred to as "business acumen" and "talent." Who then was this man? What was his background and how did he come to conceive the idea of a science fiction magazine?

Hugo Gernsback was born August 16, 1884, in the city of

Luxembourg. His father was a well-to-do wine wholesaler and his early education was received through private tutors. Later he attended the Ecole Industrielle of Luxembourg and the Technikum in Bingen, Germany. At the age of nine, a traumatic experience occurred which was to alter the entire course of his life. He had picked up a German translation of the book *Mars as the Abode of Life*, by the renowned American astronomer, Professor Percival Lowell. Though he was highly imaginative, the concept that intelligent life forms might exist on other worlds had never occurred to young Hugo. He slept restlessly that night and the next day, on the way to school, his mind wrestled with the idea, unable to resolve the enormity of its implications.

Straining for comprehension he *literally* developed a fever, which may have been psychosomatic in nature. He was immediately sent home where he lapsed into delirium, raving about the strange creatures, fantastic cities and the masterly-engineered canals of Mars for two full days and nights while a doctor remained in almost constant attendance, unable to determine the cause of his condition.

The direction which Hugo Gernsback's thinking was to take

from this point on was conditioned by that experience. He was never to be content with the accumulated scientific knowledge of his day. Now he was to search the libraries for books that opened up imaginative vistas that went beyond the scientific knowledge of the period. Though he was to become an expert technician, respected scientist and inventor, such pursuits could never satisfy him.

His mind took wings where his work left off. He almost memorized the works of Jules Verne and H. G. Wells, and wrote excursions of his own, which, despite their juvenility, displayed a sure facility for the use of words.

The telephone and communications systems were a fledgling science in Gernsback's youth, yet he taught himself their intricacies. At the age of 13 he was already accepting contracting jobs for such installations in Europe. A memorable instance in that connection was when the mother superior of the Luxembourg City Carmelite convent obtained a special dispensation from Pope Leo XIII, so that young Hugo could equip that institution with call bells.

Among the projects that Hugo occupied himself with was the invention of a battery, similar to the layer battery produced by EVER-READY in the United States

today. When both France and Germany refused him patents, he decided that there was no opportunity for a young inventor in Europe and, taking the accumulated savings from his electrical installation work, he packed up his battery and booked passage, first class, for the United States.

Not yet twenty, he landed in the United States in February 1904, with two hundred dollars in his pocket and a stiff-necked determination that no matter how tough things got, he would never, under any circumstances, request aid from his parents. He never did.

Despite the fact that Gernsback's layer battery could develop three times the amperage of any existing American unit, he had to abandon it as impractical when he learned that it could not be adapted to mass production. As a hand-produced product it would have had to sell at ten times the rate of competing products.

Though he didn't have a marketable battery he did have technical know-how, so he sold his services as an expert technician to William Roche, a New York battery manufacturer who had a contract for producing dry-cell batteries for the navy. Gernsback's position would have been as head of research at \$30 a week.

Leaving Roche's office for the laboratory, Gernsback remembered some details of employment he had left unsettled. He turned back to the office, to find Roche gone. Waiting for the man to come back, he sat down and began to examine some sample envelopes of battery chemicals laying on the boss's desk. At that point Roche re-entered the office. Viewing the envelopes in Gernsback's hand, Roche leapt to the conclusion that Gernsback was an agent of a competitor across the street, paid him a week's salary and fired him after only three hours! Never again in his life was Gernsback to work in an employee capacity for anyone.

Teaming up next with the playboy son of a well-to-do inventor of a fur-processing device, Gernsback formed the Gee-Cee Dry Battery Company, wherein he devised and built dry cell and dry storage batteries. His partner sold them to automobile manufacturers for use in starting ignitions. Business in general was good, but little money came in. The reason, Gernsback discovered, was that his partner was intercepting the checks and spending them on wine, women and song.

Nothing daunted, Gernsback got his money back from his partner's father and formed a

liaison with the largest distributor of motor car equipment supplies in New York, to manufacture batteries. This business went along quite successfully until the depression of 1907 resulted in the loss of a contract with Packard and his company, after paying its debts, had to be dissolved.

All this time, Gernsback roomed at a boarding house on 14th Street in New York. One of the boarders was Lewis Coggeshall, who was a telegraph operator on the Erie Railroad. The two of them decided to form an importing company on the side to bring into the United States experimental and research material not then commonly available, such as X-ray tubes, Geissler tubes and specialized electrical science equipment. This company, operating simultaneously with Gernsback's less fortunate ventures, was called *The Electro Importing Company*.

For this side company, which was to become the initial mail-order radio house in the world, *Gernsback designed the first home radio set in history!* Called the *Telimco* Wireless, it was advertised in the January 13, 1906 issue of the SCIENTIFIC AMERICAN, at a retail price of \$7.50. The amateur unit was composed of a transmitter as well as a receiver, since no commercial radio stations existed at the time.

The transmitter would ring a bell in another room without the use of wires. The police descended on Gernsback, accusing him of fraud, claiming that no wireless combination could be sold at his low price, but backed off frustrated when a personal demonstration of radio transmission proved the apparatus actually performed as advertised!

The set went into mass production and was sold in department stores, including Macy's, Gimbel's, Marshall Fields and F. A. O. Schwartz. In 1957, a replica of this device was placed in the Henry Ford Museum, Dearborn, Michigan, the same year the Michigan Institute of Radio Engineers and the American Radio Relay League honored Gernsback for his pioneering work in their field.

With characteristic showmanship, Gernsback helped promote his *Telimco* Wireless by building the first successfully operating walkie-talkie. Transmitter and receiver for this device were carried on a man's shoulders in downtown New York and the apparatus was described with photos in the January, 1909 MODERN ELECTRICS.

Gernsback's publishing endeavors grew out of his radio catalogue, also the first on record, which he began turning out in 1905. When his battery venture

dried up in 1907, he used the publishing experience gained in catalogue work to launch the first radio magazine in history, MODERN ELECTRICS, which began publication in 1908. The periodical was distributed by the American News Company and was profitable from the first.

In 1909 Gernsback accomplished still another pioneering innovation by opening up the world's first radio store at 69 West Broadway, New York. It was also in this year that he introduced the word "television" to the American public in an article in MODERN ELECTRICS describing early German experiments on photo transmission. The title of the article: "Television and the Telephot." By early 1910 he had formed, through his magazine, a society of 10,000 wireless radio amateurs and issued the WIRELESS BLUE BOOK. Lee de Forest, inventor of the vacuum tube which made radio possible, became the first president of the *Wireless Association of America* with Gernsback as business manager.

At the risk of having the word "first" become redundant as far as this appraisal is concerned, it should be noted that Gernsback published the first book on radio broadcasting in 1910, titled *The Wireless Telephone*, in which he predicted radio networks.

All this might have seemed

adequate achievement for any man, but Gernsback chaffed at the limitations imposed by the elementary state of scientific progress. His imagination extended horizontally, vastly beyond known boundaries. When he found himself a few pages short of material to fill the April, 1911 issue of MODERN ELECTRICS, he sat down and dashed off the first installment of *Ralph 124C 41+*, a work of science fiction.

He had no ideas beyond the first chapter, but each month at the approach of the deadline he would sit down and carry the story forward, with no concept of how it would develop or end. It ran for 12 monthly installments, concluding in the March, 1912 number and the result was probably the greatest single work of prophecy ever written by any man as fiction or fact.

The hero of the novel, which was subtitled "A Romance of the Year 2660," is Ralph—a "plus" man of that era—one of ten such extraordinary endowed individuals in the entire world. A scientifically reared superman, Ralph was the prototype of the hundreds of similar heroes who have been featured in science fiction magazines in the last thirty years. The action of the novel is best described by the description on the back of the book-jacket of the first hardcover edition, pub-

lished by the Stratford Company, Boston, in 1925:

*"Ralph's love for the beautiful stranger, his conquest of his rival, and the worsting of the great saturnine Martian, culminating in a running fight in space with tragedy and terror conquered by almost unbelievable and incredible weapons make one of the most interesting and gripping stories ever told."*

It is not the plot itself which is the truly remarkable thing about *Ralph 124C 41+*, though its picture of a running space battle may have been the inspiration of many such thrillers in the years that followed. Its distinction rests in the fantastic number of incredibly accurate predictions disguised as fiction that have come true in the forty-five years since the story was serialized.

The novel is astonishing for the number of minor predictions as well as major ones which it contained. A few of them include fluorescent lighting, skywriting, automatic packaging machines, plastics, the radio directional

range finder, juke boxes, liquid fertilizer, hydroponics, tape recorders, rustproof steel, loud speakers, night baseball, aquacades, microfilm, television, radio networks, vending machines, dispensing hot and cold foods and liquids, flying saucers, a device for teaching while the user is asleep, solar energy for heat and power, fabrics from glass such as nylon; synthetic materials for wearing apparel and of course, space travel.

The most stunning forecast was his inspired description and actual diagramming of radar: *"It has long been known that a pulsating polarized ether wave, if directed on a metal object, could be reflected in the same fashion as a light ray can be reflected from a bright surface or from a mirror. . . . If, therefore, a polarized wave generator were trained towards the open space, the waves would take a direction as shown in diagram, providing the parabolic wave reflector was used as shown. By manipulating the entire apparatus like a searchlight, waves*

1911—Gernsback  
diagrams radar.



would be sent over a large area. Then a small part of the waves would strike the metal body of the flyer and these waves would be reflected back to the sending apparatus. Here they would fall on the Actinoscope (see diagram), which records only the reflected waves, not the direct ones. From the Actinoscope the reflection factor is then determined . . . From the intensity and the elapsed time of the reflected impulses, the distance between the Earth and the flyer is then accurately calculated with but little trouble . . ."

The accuracy of Gernsback's interpretation of space sickness in *Ralph 124C 41+* has already been confirmed by air-force experiments and of dozens of other predictions yet unrealized, scarcely one of them seems improbable of achievement. *Ralph 124C 41+* bids fair to become the popular guide book to the future.

Still on the subject of forecasts, to *The Wireless Screech*, a humorous department in the February 1909, *MODERN ELECTRICALS*, science fiction writers owe a debt for the imaginative origin of matter-transmitters in science fiction. Describing *Wireless on Mars*, Gernsback, writing under the nom de plume of "Our Martian Correspondent," described the sending of food by "wireless" on the red planet. This may yet

prove to be one of his most inspired prophecies.

The name of Gernsback's publication was changed to *ELECTRICAL EXPERIMENTER* in 1913 and the dimensions expanded to letter-size. Gernsback, seeking a cartoonist to put across salient points in articles, in 1914 employed the services of Frank R. Paul. Then an editorial cartoonist for the *JERSEY JOURNAL*, Paul also had prior training as a mechanical and architectural draftsman. From that time on Paul's highly imaginative, yet mechanically precise illustrations were to become a trade mark of a Gernsback technical or science fiction magazine.

The breathtaking idea of the possibility of life on Mars which had so forcibly impressed itself on the youthful Gernsback never left him. Finally, in a series titled *Baron Münchhausen's New Scientific Adventures*, which began in the May, 1915, *ELECTRICAL EXPERIMENTER*, Gernsback after a brief divergence in helping the allies conquer Berlin, took Münchhausen to Mars. Here he repaid his debt to Lowell, with detailed descriptions of the life, inventions and philosophy of the Martians, leavened with considerable humor and satire.

It is the element of wit and humor that has generally been

overlooked in appraisals of Gernsback. Personally he is a man of almost Prussian bearing, with sharp features and a habit of using a monocle when he reads restaurant menus. It is understandable that these characteristics, coupled with his serious scientific interests, have given a good many people a misleading impression. The truth of the matter is that socially Gernsback is a man of almost rapier-like wit, with a chronically mischievous gleam in his eyes and with the rare ability to joke about his own misfortunes.

Writers soon came to regard Gernsback's *ELECTRICAL EXPERIMENTER* as a regular market for science fiction. His guide for selecting stories was simple. If the story did not avoid an explanation of its unusual occurrence, and if that explanation was logical in the light of known science, he would buy it providing the literary elements made it good entertainment.

When *ELECTRICAL EXPERIMENTER* metamorphosed into *SCIENCE AND INVENTION* in August, 1920, he frequently began to use two such stories in each issue, in addition to one in the companion periodical *RADIO NEWS*. At first he developed his own group of writers, Clement Fézandié, Charles S. Wolfe, C. M. Adams and John De Quer

among them, but soon such established favorites as Ray Cummings, George Allan England and John Martin Leahy were attracted to the new market.

In August, 1923, he published a special "Scientific Fiction Number" of *SCIENCE AND INVENTION*. That issue contained six science fiction stories and a cover of a space-suited man, illustrating *The Man From the Atom* by G. Peyton Wertenbaker, a precocious 13-year old who was later to become an editor of *FORTUNE MAGAZINE*.

One reason for the special issue was the backlog of science fiction stories piling up at *SCIENCE AND INVENTION*, but it quickly persuaded *ARGOSY* and *WEIRD TALES* to alter their policies to include stories with a better grounding in science. The beginning of the end for the scientific romance which had been popularized by Edgar Rice Burroughs was brought nearer by this event, and the pattern of modern science fiction was in the process of formation.

Except for a freakish circumstance, Gernsback would have issued the first science fiction magazine in 1924. That year he sent out 25,000 circulars soliciting subscriptions for a new type of magazine based on the stories of Verne, Wells and Poe to be titled *SCIENTIFCTION*. The subscription reaction was so cool

that Gernsback did nothing further for another two years, at which time he dumped AMAZING STORIES fully developed on the stands without a word of advance notice.

In the June, 1926, issue of AMAZING STORIES, in an editorial titled "The Lure of Scientifiction," Gernsback took notice of the hitherto unrecognized, extremely gratifying fact that a ready-made market existed for a science fiction magazine. "One of the great surprises since we started publishing AMAZING STORIES," he began, "is the tremendous amount of mail we receive from—shall we call them 'Scientifiction Fans?'—who seem to be pretty well orientated in this sort of literature. From the suggestions for reprints that are coming in these 'fans' seem to have a hobby of their own of hunting up scientifiction stories, not only in English, but in many other languages."

As a result of this discovery, Gernsback started a reader's department entitled "Discussions" which actually established a forum for the organization of the science fiction fan movement, one of the most colorful aspects of science fiction today.

Taking a survey of his readers, Gernsback found that more frequent publication was desired by the overwhelming majority.

To test this, he published in 1927 a companion to AMAZING STORIES titled AMAZING STORIES ANNUAL. For this publication he commissioned Edgar Rice Burroughs to write a new novel, *The Master Mind of Mars*, for which the author was paid \$1,200. The 100,000-edition ANNUAL was almost a sellout, despite its fifty cent price.

Success established, Gernsback replaced the annual with AMAZING STORIES QUARTERLY in 1928, which ran a full-length novel as well as short stories in every issue and also sold for fifty cents. This new venture, too, showed a profit.

AMAZING STORIES and AMAZING STORIES QUARTERLY featured the work of many new authors, writing material to fit their needs. Prominent among them were David H. Keller, M.D., the pioneer in what later was to become popular as "psychological" science fiction stories; Edward E. Smith, creator of the super-science tale, John W. Campbell, Jr., Philip Francis Nowlan, whose stories of Anthony (Buck) Rogers ran in AMAZING STORIES long before they appeared as a comic strip; Stanton A. Coblenz, magazine science fiction's best satirist in the tradition of Jonathan Swift; A Hyatt Verrill, outstanding archaeologist, as well as Fletcher Pratt, later a celebrated naval writer, Harl

Vincent, Bob Olsen, Miles J. Bruer, M.D. and Jack Williamson.

The passage of the years found Gernsback's Experimenter Publishing Company grown into a veritable empire of newsstand periodicals, including in addition to AMAZING STORIES and AMAZING STORIES QUARTERLY, such publications as SCIENCE AND INVENTION, RADIO NEWS, YOUR BODY, TID BITS (an outgrowth of FRENCH HUMOR), COOKOO NUTS and a wide variety of one-shots, comic books, radio annuals, and hard-cover books. To top it off, Hugo Gernsback had for some years operated radio broadcast station WRNY in New York City.

Readers of the NEW YORK TIMES did a double-take Monday, August 13, 1928, when they read: "WRNY to Start Daily Television Broadcasts." In 1928, television was still a frequently used theme in science fiction. Only a few hundred crude scanning disk experimental sets capable of picking up television waves existed. The radio page of the NEW YORK TIMES for August 21, 1928, carried the *program* of the world's first television station. After each radio program, station WRNY televised the face of the performer. Westinghouse had occasionally transmitted moving pictures experimentally by tele-

vision, but *live* broadcasts on a commercial basis were unknown.

Coinciding with his television casting, Gernsback issued the pioneer television magazine titled simply TELEVISION. Its very appearance in 1928 was more fantastic than the science fiction in AMAZING STORIES.

Gernsback's fabulous success and showmanship did not go unnoticed. Bernarr Macfadden, health faddist who had climbed to fame and a publishing empire with PHYSICAL CULTURE, a magazine featuring articles on sex, diet, nudism and back-to-nature material, saw in Gernsback a potential competitor. True, Macfadden still frequently walked to work barefooted, trailed by a host of reporters and did headstands on his office desk, but that was pretty tame stuff compared to television. While Macfadden's TRUE STORY magazine rocketed to two million circulation under the editorship of F. Olin Tremaine, a man who a few years later was to head ASTOUNDING STORIES, the weekly LIBERTY, bucking the well-established SATURDAY EVENING POST and COLLIERS, though it sold a lot of copies, wasn't getting much advertising.

The superiority of the scientific approach in Gernsback's YOUR BODY, which pointed to science as the answer to man's

physical, sex and psychological problems, represented a threat to the blustering sensationalism of PHYSICAL CULTURE. Gernsback's offer of \$10,000 to any medium who could actually contact the dead and his use of the famous magician Dunninger to explode such fakes, threatened the existence of Macfadden's none-too-profitable GHOST STORIES, which appealed to the superstition and ignorance of the masses. Nor could Macfadden's TRUE STRANGE STORIES, despite its reprints of H. G. Wells and fake photos, hold a candle to AMAZING STORIES.

Macfadden (who lived in the same apartment house as Gernsback, at 527 Riverside Drive) now offered to buy Gernsback out, lock, stock and barrel. Gernsback, heading what had grown to a million-dollar corporation, refused to consider the offer. The Experimenter Publishing Company and all its subsidiaries was a going and profitable concern, he asserted, and so diversified it most likely was to stay that way.

One day in April, 1929, Gernsback was awakened early in the morning by the telephone. It was a reporter from the NEW YORK TIMES. He wanted to know what was to become of radio station WRNY now that bankruptcy proceedings had been filed against the Experimenter Pub-

lishing Company. Gernsback was incredulous but the reporter insisted the story was true.

According to the law of 1929, if three or more creditors pressed the matter, a company or an individual could be forced into bankruptcy, regardless of whether they were solvent or not, merely because they had been late in payments. This was similar to the law which permitted mortgagers to foreclose when an installment was a single day late and thereby frequently gain possession of property worth more than the mortgage.

Gernsback now went to the authorities. He showed them the papers from Macfadden offering to buy him out. He claimed that all three of the creditors were also Macfadden suppliers.

The authorities, after considering the evidence, said that there was nothing they could do for Gernsback, but any attempt by Macfadden to obtain Experimenter titles would strengthen the conspiracy charges and provide grounds for an investigation. Macfadden never did bid for the titles and the creditors, in what the NEW YORK TIMES referred to as "bankruptcy deluxe" received \$1.08 for each \$1.00 due them, certainly an amazing performance for a "bankrupt" company. The bankruptcy law which had brought

Gernsback to grief was changed, but a week too late to do him any good.

A company called Teck Publications took over RADIO NEWS and AMAZING STORIES. In 1939 both of these magazines were purchased by Ziff-Davis and have been under that banner ever since. RADIO NEWS, now titled ELECTRONICS WORLD, leads the field in circulation.

Gernsback was far from licked. He sent out a series of circulars. To readers of SCIENCE AND INVENTION he announced that he would publish EVERYDAY MECHANICS; subscribers of RADIO NEWS could get RADIO-CRAFT and AMAZING STORIES fans found that they could look forward to a SCIENCE WONDER STORIES. The result was electric. Over 8,000 subscriptions poured in, so respected was the Gernsback name. If Gernsback had not possessed a cent of his own, he would have had sufficient capital to launch his new Stellar Publishing Company.

The first issue of SCIENCE WONDER STORIES was dated June, 1929. Gernsback had taken with him the illustrator Frank R. Paul and most of his best new science fiction authors, including David H. Keller, Stanton A. Coblenz, Jack Williamson, Harl Vincent, Fletcher Pratt, Philip Francis Nowlan (under pen

name of Frank Phillips), and Bob Olsen. Most important, he coined for the first time in print in his editorial in the first SCIENCE WONDER STORIES, the term "Science Fiction" which was to become the permanent name of the genre, completely eclipsing "scientifiction"

With the third issue of SCIENCE WONDER STORIES began *The Problems of Space Flying*, translated from the German of Captain Herman Noordung, *the first factual material on an earth satellite to appear in America!* Frank R. Paul depicted the space station on the cover of the magazine, painting what is probably the première color interpretation of such a concept.

SCIENCE WONDER STORIES was soon followed by AIR WONDER STORIES, SCIENTIFIC DETECTIVE MONTHLY and SCIENCE WONDER QUARTERLY. Gernsback has received credit for publishing the first science fiction magazine in history, but the truth is that he brought into being the first seven such periodicals! While the specialized AIR WONDER STORIES and SCIENTIFIC DETECTIVE MONTHLY did not last long, Gernsback kept SCIENCE WONDER QUARTERLY going for a three-year period by featuring *all interplanetary* issues, taking cognizance of the fact that such stories were the most popular of all types of science fiction.

Most of Gernsback's problems during this period were caused by the fact that each month that passed carried the nation and the Stellar Publishing Company deeper into the depression. The passage of time found the resourceful Gernsback trying with unflagging energy to keep his new company afloat. In science fiction, his publications either combined or metamorphized into a variety of sizes and shapes, including the first all-slick paper magazine of its type—WONDER STORIES.

He was the first to lower the magazine purchase price in the field to fifteen cents. He never stopped pioneering. He beat the drums for more science fiction movies and later attempted to organize an annual Science Fiction Day. He did form, in 1934, *The Science Fiction League*, patterned after his old wireless organization. It was one of the most constructive ideas ever promulgated by a fantasy periodical to promote the medium.

To revivify American science fiction, he introduced in translation outstanding works by German writers Otto Willi Gail, Otfried von Hanstein, Hans Dominik, Fredrich Freksa, Bruno H. Burgel, Ludwig Anton, Max Valier, F. Golub and Leo am Bruhl. From France he imported novels by R. H. Romans, S. S. Held and Charles de Richter.

Finally, when all else failed, in a candid appraisal of the factors that made it impossible for him to continue to distribute the magazine WONDER STORIES on the newsstand, he offered to send each issue to the reader in advance, with a bill for fifteen cents and a postage-prepaid return envelope if they would mail in a request form.

Only 2,000 replies were received and he regretfully sold the magazine to Standard Magazines, where it was continued under the directorship of Leo Margulies as THRILLING WONDER STORIES.

This was not the last that the science fiction world was to see of Gernsback. The year 1939 found him experimenting with three issues of SUPERWORLD COMICS, the first science fiction comic magazine, with the lead strip drawn by Frank R. Paul. He was too early in the field and the magazine failed.

However, his RADIO-CRAFT, which had changed with the times to RADIO ELECTRONICS as television came into the American home in a big way, grew into one of the leading publications of its type in the world. A daring experiment in newsstand publishing, SEXOLOGY, a digest-sized magazine presenting sex in a popular but dignified manner, paid off when the con-

tributions and endorsements of many physicians and even the clergy proved that this delicate subject could be discussed with candor in a newsstand publication.

With these two successful publications, Gernsback in 1953 took one more flyer at science fiction. He published **SCIENCE FICTION PLUS**, an 8½ x 11 magazine, printed on 50-lb. coated stock, carrying no advertisements and featuring five-color covers and two-color interiors. However, the mass audience necessary to support it could not be reached and it folded after seven issues.

Gernsback did not have to prove himself further. His role was acknowledged. The radio-electronics industry awarded

him the magnificent silver Hugo Gernsback Trophy in 1953 for 50 years of service to the radio-electronic art. The 1952 World Science Fiction Convention held in Chicago had him as guest of honor and beginning with Philadelphia in 1953, achievement awards presented at conventions were called "Hugos."

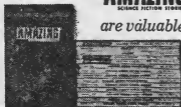
So frequently right, Mr. Gernsback proved in distinct error at least once. His editorial in the first, April, 1926, **AMAZING STORIES** contained the statement, "Edgar Allan Poe may well be called the father of 'scientifiction'." Everyone today knows that the real "Father of Science Fiction" is Hugo Gernsback and no one can ever take the title away from him.

#### THE END

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# *Trajectory To Taurus*

By **LES COLLINS**

ILLUSTRATOR FINLAY

***Out in the reaches of space an ultimate disaster raced at light-speeds toward Earth. Only a massive sacrifice could save Mankind now. And so he turned, as always, to his Eternal Mother.***

---

FRED KIRR, stomach twisting with shock, turned from the viewscreen and looked directly into the deep blue eyes of the girl. "Would you repeat that?" he asked, fighting to keep urgency from his voice.

Ordinarily, JoAnn Chase's eyes danced merrily in tune with her vivacious personality; now, however, they were filled with an inner light akin to fanaticism, and Fred felt his scalp crawl. Without taking her eyes from the planet, in a hypnotic-like state, Jo answered, "I just said, 'Oh, my God!'"

"I know," Fred interjected hastily. "We were in complete agreement up to that point. But what did you say next?"

"It's indescribably lovely, heavenly! Compared to it, Earth is a dessicated old hag, a vapid, colorless rock that tediously circles the sun."

Fred thought silently: When we left Earth, a few days ago, you looked back and called her a blue-green jewel. Then, to check himself, he looked once more at the planet, even now perceptibly larger in the center of the screen. Heavenly? Far from it, a diametric opposite, for he still saw in it a face that might have been dredged from the nightmare horror of his unconscious. It was a face from hell, and he couldn't shake the impression. Even if he wanted to be dispa-

sionate in evaluation, he'd still have to call the cancerous blob a desert planet . . .

"Jo!" Fred's call was a plea for help, "I've got to speak to you—"

The girl interrupted with an impatient shake of her blonde locks, put a finger to her lips. For a moment, Fred was reminded of a small boy being quieted during the Sunday sermon. His confusion and fear came boiling out as aggression. After all, this *was* only a planet; Jo hadn't the right to make it a religious ceremony. He stamped away . . . but soon was wrestling with the problem again; Fred was too well trained in the scientific method not to. Given: two reasonably competent observers. Event: a planet that the expedition had set out to find. Descriptions: completely opposite. Conclusion: well, what? Is sanity to be questioned? Whose? And be honest with yourself. Add the overtones of what could be emotional involvement with a girl you've only recently met.

Fred was surprised to find himself in the ship's control center. The hugeness of Captain John Charlesworth was bent over a star chart. Charlesworth was a big, solid man who loved living. He had taught Fred practically everything there was to know about operating the ship—

with automation being what it was, he was able to do it in the three days they'd been traveling. The two men were friends from the time they'd been introduced, so perhaps it wasn't strange that Fred should be here.

"John," Fred began without preamble, "there's something about that planet—"

Charlesworth's face split into a grin. "There sure is! Beauty, isn't she? Thought you'd like it. If we find life, it'll be there."

Fred was caught short. It was another strike against him. Some instinct warned him to be quiet, and he left as soon as he could. "Curiouser and curiouser," he mused, then reached a decision. He had a purpose now.

The other two members of the expedition were also watching the approach to the planet. Fred found them in the recreation area. Richard Lodgesen, the lean, tall chemist-physicist, looked up at Fred's approach, said with a supercilious air, "I should think the anthropology section would be studying the planet as hard as we."

Data, Fred, data! Ignore the jerk; just integrate this information: he was easily distracted. "I *am* studying. What do you think of it?"

Lodgesen smiled warmly, the first time he'd reacted pleasantly around Fred. "I think we're all

of the same opinion. This discovery will rock 'em up back home."

"And you, Beth?"

Beth Rosen, their data coordinator, *Huh?ed*, and gave Fred her attention grudgingly. "My opinion? It's . . . it's like coming home, Fred. Why do you ask?"

Of them all, Beth was the only one who was curious about Fred's activities. "No important reason," he was suddenly aware of a bead of sweat on his forehead as he looked at the screen. Home? More like the poorhouse. But he continued to lie, "Just doing a little survey." He wandered away, thoughts in turmoil.

He must be careful of Beth. He'd learned very fast to respect her on both professional and interpersonal grounds. The gal had a mind like a steel trap; she had a body that caused males—adolescents to elders—to fantasy, and females—of *any* age—to envy. Beth, as data coordinator, had a role on the ground similar to Charlesworth's in space. Although the data coordinator rarely went to extremes, she or he was fed all information the expedition collected, had ultimate power for decision and responsibility.

And how was Fred to give her this information? Add it up—but it wouldn't add. JoAnn Chase, semantics, deeply taken with the planet; Beth Rosen, data coordinator, in a state of

lassitude but not as strongly influenced as Jo; John Charlesworth, captain, highly enthusiastic; Richard Lodgesen, chemistry-physics, showing more joyous emotion than the cold fish could possibly be expected to; and Fred Kirr, anthropology, who tended as far toward dislike as Beth did like, possibly as far as Jo.

Item: no one acted abnormal.

Item: on the basis of very bad statistical sampling, it seemed the women were reacting far more than the men to this particular encounter.

Item: you, Fred Kirr, are the only one to have an anti-reaction. Are you insane? No, you've always been this way. In school, the times you got good grades were when you were sure you'd flunked. Or, take your Tanganyika discovery in 1965: a complete skeleton of the *Dryopithecinae*, showing anthropoid differentiation by late Miocene. The scientific world hailed this as strong evidence that, in *Life's* words, "the evolution of that primate called 'man' began fantastically farther back than we'd ever before dreamed." Your reaction was discouragement; there was too much conclusion jumping; nothing at all had been proved.

Come to think of it, all 28 of your years have been spent with reverse reaction. And now you

have a situation that must soon be resolved.

Fred shook his head. The change in the others seemed so sudden. It was only a few hours ago that the ship had come out of hyper.

He'd been watching the newly visible star system wondering, Will you be the one? Somewhere in your depths, is there the key to our mystery?

"Hi, Gloomy Gus!" JoAnn joined him, excited pleasure bubbling from her.

"Gloomy—"

"All right, you weren't being gloomy, just concentrating. You're still known to the rest of us as Gloomy Gus . . ." She giggled.

"I was thinking about intelligent life," Fred said.

"I'll bet," the girl added, "you were thinking I wouldn't have a job because, as usual, we won't find it. But we're *bound* to, eventually, so why not now?"

He had to smile; her attitude was infectious. "Matter of fact, I *was* thinking we'd miss. I even wonder what we're doing out here—"

Charlesworth's voice, on the intercom, broke in: "attention, please. We have come out of hyperspace in the constellation Taurus. As you know, nothing has been said about our destination; this is done to avoid prej-

udicing you. I'll now play the recorded instructions from General Anderson."

A new voice took over, sounding even more mechanical. "Ladies and gentlemen, you are making history. Whatever you do will make history, United States' history—"

Fred, the only member who'd been out before, said, "They always begin that way. You'd think—"

Jo shooshed him, and they continued listening. "This expedition is one of the many under the administration of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration and coordinated by the joint armed forces. You are aboard the Exploration Frigate DLE 560, also known as USS Taurus. The general volume of space around you is the Taurus moving cluster, a roughly globular group of 100 stars. Your destination is the Hyades open cluster, specifically Gamma Tauri.

"Your primary mission is, as always, to find and contact intelligent life. However, secondarily, you may be able to shed some light on the phenomenon we call 'moving clusters.' These are ill-defined groups of stars, all in parallel motion.

"Taurus is moving away from us at 28.5 miles per second. Now 130 light years away, the group was closest to us—some 65 light

years—only 800 thousand years ago . . ."

Fred stopped listening. Why, that long ago, man was already differentiated. In another half-million years, more or less, the gang around the old juke box in Java would be using fire . . . only he wouldn't really be man, just an unreasonable facsimile. Man? He wouldn't show up for another 450 millennia—too soon, too soon. Something's got to be done about our theories: in 25,000 years, we appeared as a clever savage, developed to our present state. What were we doing in all the years the lower hominids were evolving? Where were we?

No matter. In 25,000 years, we haven't had a chance to mature. Because of political pressure, DLE 560 is out into the universe, trying to befriend other intelligences. And so are a host of other peoples from Earth: peoples who owe their allegiance to imaginary lines on Earth's surface. Suppose we do make contact? Can we—man, that is—handle the job? *Have* we matured? Why are we here?

The learning curve is exponential. It took man nearly 50 years to go from Jenny to jet, from Kittyhawk to Canaveral. It took him little more than a decade to go from *Titan* to trans-continuum, from exploring Earth to exploring the universe.

And man being a contrary, contumacious, cockeyed Cat, it wasn't a good thing, Man.

There were some cynics who thought it was the most miserable thing that could happen to the universe. They based this on the shrieking ambivalence man displayed in the total course of events, primarily bad, he'd created and lived through. He began meekly enough. Hunted and planted and found a little leisure. With that commodity, he set up special caves and began to paint, to sculpture, to philosophize.

Then he changed. Maybe it was the cold draughts in the caves, maybe it was the old lady complaining about the draughts, or maybe it was plain frustration: he'd been trying, for a couple of thousand years, to invent writing and had failed. In any event, man was suddenly different. He found that scrambled brains—his neighbor's—were good eating. Ever the artist, he enjoyed the color of blood much more than those dull old mineral pigments. If a couple of the guys sneaked up behind a herd of horses and suddenly scared them, what fun! The whole herd would stampede off a cliff.

Aesthetic? Certainly. He went back into the caves and tried his hand at dirty pictures; had to give that up, though, until he invented plain Brown envelopes

and photography. Anyway, he'd lost the touch . . . except in one area. These products were works of art, a delight to behold: man was making the damndest, finest arrowheads and spear points he'd ever seen.

She, who may have jerked him out of the cave in the beginning, continued to warm her feet on his back, with the result that he'd go out and knock over a country rich in coal deposits. She didn't really like it, but she was stuck with it. Certainly, she was carrying out her function. If there were a war or two too many, she could always up production—having discovered how well before they set up cave-keeping. The flutter of an eyelash or an exposed ankle . . . she carried out her function, and the population kept rising.

By the opening of the twentieth century, however, she'd grown apprehensive. Man was playing with bigger and bigger boom-boom toys. She tried to exert control, discovered too late it was out of her hands. For one day, man brought home the keenest, ginger-peachiest job of them all. Like maybe he could blow himself to hell with an atomic bomb.

Elders had shaken their heads over it; youngsters had joined them when the fusion bomb came next. And the world settled down

to hold its breath while the two leading powers fenced economically—with Russia thrusting and the U. S. parrying.

Suddenly, two other nations appeared on the world scene—rather, reappeared. Great Britain, at one time the strongest nation, in one stroke became the richest: Britain, of necessity, for years had been researching magnetohydrodynamics in an effort to get controlled fusion. While the two “leading” powers were threatening one another, the British engineered practical atomics and had energy to burn, if the phrase will be excused.

And then there was France. Long influential in world history, this small country was reduced by two wars to a minor position. France had at one time been the seat of scientific progress in the world. The French regained status when they got antigravity. Zwicky, at Cal Tech, had long ago shown that the effect of gravity occurred either twice or one-half the speed of light. Apparently no one paid much attention, except for a few obscure French philosophers.

And so, in the course of eight months in 1964-1965, the focus of power in the world again shifted to the English Channel. Of course, these developments were secret. If the U. S. and U. S. S. R. were left with their

tongues hanging out, they didn't realize it. But not for long. You just can't keep things like that secret. And man being what he is . . .

The French were spying on the British; the British on the Russians; the Russians on the United States; and the U. S. was spying on all three.

Antigravity had its limits. With it, you could never exceed light speed because you were confined to the physical, Einsteinian universe. What was needed was raw energy to warp the continuum, fold it like a piece of paper, and punch a hole through it as a short cut. That's where controlled fusion came in. And even though it required tons of equipment, antigravity made it possible to get those tons off the ground.

By 1970, the four powers were racing to explore the universe. If anything, relations between them were worse. All gave lip service to the noble idea of finding intelligent life; actually, the world knew that the first nation to find such life would be enlisting a powerful ally, creating a shift in power that might mean control.

There were exceptions. Take Russia, who'd brought the Red Chinese along too fast. As many had predicted as far back as 1941, the U. S. S. R. was now trying to play footsie with the

West. Unfortunately, there no longer was a West as such. Each was to its own. So the world groaned under a new burden when it was rumored that the Chinese were working on their first transcontinuum ship.

With the power of fusion at his command, man had everything he could possibly want. But it had come too soon; he was unaware. Instead, he went into space looking for intelligence equal to or greater than his own, looking for a new club to use against his neighbors on Earth. Man, the cynics said, was too immature, would destroy himself before 1980—himself and the life he's trying to find. The cynics were in overwhelming preponderance. Yet a few voices were raised in hope: Don't let this throw you, but is it possible that the artist-philosopher had again come to the fore?

The shift in the others had seemed abrupt to Fred. They were far more interested in that damned planet than in him; this should have been perfectly natural except for the speed of occurrence.

As the only space veteran, Fred was listened to carefully. Further, as the anthropologist, he was in a position to tell them things they wanted to know.

Soon after they'd come out of hyper, the group gathered in the

recreation area. In the three days of the trip, they'd grown used to meeting there for discussion. And this time, they were excited about the possibility of life.

"Somehow," Jo said, "I feel that *we* are destined to do what none of the others has done."

There was general concurrence. "Right!" Charlesworth interjected.

Fred frowned, shook his head.

"Why not? How can you know, Kirr?" Lodgesen, as usual, was his snobbish self.

"Why not? You ought to know more than I about randomness and screwed-up statistics, Lodgesen." Fred was on his feet for emphasis. "Frankly, from what we've learned out here, I'd rather count on winning the sweepstakes . . . without having a ticket. That's how bad the odds are."

"Fred," Beth said softly, "we concede you know your business; and you were on two other expeditions that found traces of very high orders of intelligence on deserted planets. But why do you feel so strongly? I should think those traces would be encouraging."

Again he shook his head. "It's not that simple. Here's the run-down: five years ago we began sending out expeditions. So did the other countries. Naturally, we tried the stars nearest us; so

did they. We've very effectively covered the nearest parts of the galaxy. No life."

"But evidence of it," Lodgesen objected. "Counting all extinct cultures found by the various powers, I'd guess the total is upwards of 10 or 11."

Fred smiled humorously. "The total is 47 finds; for some reason, no one is telling all. Security. Fortunately, Dr. Kousansky is a good friend of mine, and Professeur de Poitiers is a friend of his, and so on down the line.

"We're guessing, of course, but it seems our little corner of the universe is deserted. A more profitable question than *where*? is *why*? You might also be interested in the times involved; they're lengthy enough to cause head scratching. Wendell, at London University, came up with the oldest—some 585 thousand years, based on radioactive dating, but he won't guarantee the figure any closer than  $\pm 50$  thousand. And the French, as you know, were the first out; de Poitiers did a very thorough job on Alpha Centauri IV. Until 30 thousand years ago, give or take, she had a thriving little community. I don't think you're going to find intelligent life this close, even within 500 light years. To me, the wonder is why we're here at all when everyone else has left."

There it was. He'd let them have it between the eyes, and they resented it. From that time on, he was something of a pariah. Even Jo seemed to be ignoring him. The nearer they came to planetfall, the worse it got. At least she lost that look of inner truth, but she was terribly, terribly busy. For what? Obviously, preparing for what they should find.

The USS Taurus circled the planet, Gamma Tauri II. As Fred had expected, it seemed a negative quantity, just another of those hunks of cosmic mediocrity. By the third trip, he was completely convinced this thing had evolved nothing. He was more relieved than he cared to admit; now Charlesworth would go on. There were more promising planets in the system.

He'd spent the last hour writing his report—NASA/DD Form E-72, Rev. B in triplicate—when it occurred to him that Charlesworth had made no announcement. Fred went to the captain's cabin, found Beth in discussion with him.

"Glad you're here; we want to talk something over," Charlesworth said. There was a pause, and Fred, watching the other two, felt as though he were an intruder.

"Sure," he said, dropping into a chair.

"You're sort of strait-laced,

but rules are made to be broken . . ." Charlesworth's voice trailed off.

Beth came directly to the point: "We all want to land on New Earth."

*New Earth!* Fred was stunned but managed to keep silent.

"Sure," Charlesworth beamed, a big happy bear, "that way you get a couple of days vacation at government expense, and no one's the wiser."

Fred shrugged, trying to appear normal. "I don't see anything wrong with it." Hardly aware of his words, he was thinking rapidly. Why convince me? Have the four of them sensed my attitude?

"There could be something so right with it!" Beth added. "If it turns out to be what it seems, we'll take the news home. You don't find many planets like this—"

*You sure don't!* The young anthropologist gripped the chair arms, again swept by nausea. He was sure he hadn't thought that or said it. Was he hearing voices? Neither Beth nor John seemed to notice. He had to get out of there, caught in a sudden claustrophobic nightmare.

"I don't need any convincing," he said, hoping it sounded convincing. "I'm ready for that vacation right now. Good night." Drenched with sweat, he stumbled from the cabin.

During the next few days, Fred went through a series of emotional oscillations the like of which he'd never experienced. He'd nosedive into the pit of depression; when he landed, he found himself atop the peak of Mount Euphoria. Finally, however, he came to an important conclusion. If he were ready for the squirrel factory, he'd wait until the DLE 560 returned to Earth. He certainly didn't feel violent, so he'd be crazy like a fox and keep his mouth shut.

He was amazed at the adaptability of the human psyche, for there were three most-probable alternatives to face: he was mentally ill, the other four were ditto, or all of them were. Facing that, he could be quite calm. He doubted but didn't discount the possibility that they were all sane.

After two days of self-imposed exile, he came out of his cabin. His relations with the opposition—how easily he fell into the term!—were polite but strained. Except Lodgesen. The two men, never cordial, now fell into a state of cold war, characterized chiefly by refusal to speak. This was the only open rupture.

Fred began to help them, to join their somewhat frenetic activities. Apparently each was engaged in exploration, bringing



back to the ship samples of soil, rocks, vegetation, and the like. However, he was never invited to go with them, and as time passed, he found it harder and harder to reach them.

JoAnn was his last link. Perhaps it was the feeling of rapport they'd had on the journey out here—or perhaps it was simply that she felt sorry for his present state. In any event, Jo would talk freely to him.

It was late in the evening of the sixth day. Jo was showing him the samples they'd collected a few hours earlier. The recreation area had been hastily converted into a sort of museum. In it, the exhibit had grown to an impressive pile . . . of junk. But Jo was vivacious enough to make a mummy jump, and he enjoyed listening to her.

"Don't you see, Fred? We've got huge amounts of data; New Earth is a paradise, rich in everything we could possibly want. This is the place where our peoples will want to come. We'll be hailed for this discovery!"

For a moment, as she spoke, he did see through her eyes: the place man had always dreamt of. This Eden abounded in game, in forests drained by sparkling brooks. All of the riches were here; animal, vegetable, mineral wealth were so plentiful that . . .

*that the streets were paved with gold*, he thought sourly, as the vision faded. No, it was just a common planet, undistinguished.

"Why don't we go home, Jo, and tell them?"

The blonde lost her sparkle, became blank. As though she hadn't heard his question, she cast about nervously, picked up a rock.

"Look at this!" She was enthusiastic again. "Uranium! Dick Lodgesen has been analyzing ores. He says the place is fantastically rich in heavy minerals."

Fred turned the specimen in his hand. It was dense quartzite. Heavy enough, but it lacked the other characteristics.

"What makes you think it isn't uranium?" she demanded furiously.

"I said nothing of the sort." Fred suddenly had the feeling of a clue, especially because of Jo's reaction: again the blankness, again the nervousness.

"I saw it in your face." Jo edged to the end of one table. "Here's today's find. Seedless grapes, each as big as a lemon. Have one." She held out her hand.

*There was nothing in it.*

Fred didn't bat an eyelash; he'd grown used to shocks. He merely replied, "No, thanks. Still full from dinner." And then integrated more data.

They finished the tour at her cabin. From the time that the trip started, and until the last few nights, Fred had insisted on "walking the girl home." And each time, before he left her, he'd quasi-seriously propositioned her with a request that the door be left open. It was always shut, very firmly.

Tonight, Fred was grave. Almost curt, he said, "Goodnight. See you in the morning."

"Wait." She smiled. "If you could learn to be as happy as we on this planet, you might find the door open."

He smiled in return. "I'll think about it. Night." Fred strode away, thinking: Jo, you'd make a lousy Mata Hari. But thanks for convincing me I'm sane!

Relief brought emotional reaction; he wanted to laugh, but it was aggressive, humorless laughter, and he couldn't afford it. Instead, he permitted himself the luxury of silent anger. Complete. Total.

When the curtain of fury dissolved, Fred found himself in the recreation area. Unknowingly, he'd wandered there. Unknowingly, he'd arrived at a course of action—

*You won't have a chance to carry it out.*

That voice again! It was inside his head. This time, however, Fred straightened, uncon-

sciously, said, "So I was wrong, and we did find intelligent life."

*But not the sort you expected.*

"Admitted. It's difficult to believe that a planet is alive."

*Why so? Logically, you animals are the difficult beliefs. Nearly all else in the universe is direct—energy conversion, formation of elements, and the like. You animals require many things to get started: a planet; a fluid medium such as water; and the delicate balance of conditions for food input and waste removal. In a sense, you're parasites.*

"Certainly. But why are you trying so hard to convince my friends to be parasites?" Fred stopped for a second, struck by a thought. "Come to think of it, why am I immune?"

*There is always a certain small percentage who have crossed mental patterns, whom we can communicate with. What the others see as desirable, you dislike. If you'll think a moment, you'll realize you've always been that way.*

Fred nodded. He was the eternal pessimist surrounded by optimists.

*My desire is simple. I want a population.*

"Why?"

*We use animal intelligence. When you die, we absorb the life force directly. It sustains our own.*

"In a sense," Fred felt he'd scored, "you also are a parasite. You talk as though there are other sentient planets in the universe."

*There are, though not in great numbers. Our life cycle is similar to yours. We are born in cosmic space of elemental material; we attract animal populations that have evolved on the dead planets, and thereby gain the energy needed to live—just as you live from the lower animals. We even grow old and die after two or three billion years. But I'm young, and this is the first time I've been in this portion of the galaxy—I need a population.*

"You seem to know what's in my mind," Fred said calmly, "so I'm afraid you're going to be disappointed."

*No, I need the others here for a little more time; they must be completely convinced of my wonders so they can take the story home. I can do without you, however. Why do you think I've bothered at all to communicate with you?*

Fred's spine was icy. His mouth was dry, and all of the dark shapes that terrified him throughout his youth came home to jibber behind his back. But Fred was a man, and he refused to turn his head, to give in to the fear. "I don't know why."

*I couldn't let you take the ship*

*from my surface. I have no physical control over you, and I can't speak directly to the others, only influence their emotions. While I've delayed you, I've aroused one of them . . . Now you have your answer.*

There was a step behind him. Expecting Lodgesen, Fred turned, stopped in shock. The 6½-foot, 285-pound bulk of Charlesworth stood poised, then raced forward. Fred hadn't time to get set, bounced when the automaton hit him, fell heavily against the exhibit table. Instantly, Charlesworth had dropped on him. The big man's hands were around Fred's throat.

His vision blurred; little spots of ink crept down over Charlesworth's face; it was too much of an effort to lift his arms and try to push him away.

There was a quick rush of thoughts. Wish you'd stop; it hurts. But what's this? Something cool and heavy in my hand. I suppose I should try it . . .

When Fred's head cleared, he saw Charlesworth stretched out beside him, his chin split and bleeding. The hunk of quartzite lay between the captain and Fred.

He hadn't the time to be glad he was alive. The others were up; running footsteps were converging on him. He got up, staggered from the room. Then, as

strength returned, he raced for the control center.

He almost made it. But Beth suddenly appeared from the opposite end of the corridor. Face contorted in some nameless horror, she screamed a warning, ran towards the door to the center. And Beth was closer.

Agonizingly closer. She'd be there a step ahead of him, and if she got that door locked— With crystal clarity, he knew it meant the end of progress for the human race.

Fred, who was hardly aware of baseball, desperately arched his body into a perfect slide. It got faint cheers from Cobb, Mays, and all the kids who ever played sandlot ball. Beth's feet tangled with Fred's; she stumbled against the door, tripped, and rolled into the corridor.

Fred scrambled inside, locked the door. He was home safe.

He would now bring them all home safe.

He couldn't know that the worst was coming.

Charlesworth gingerly felt his jaw as he walked into the recreation area. "Did you have to clobber me so hard?"

Fred grinned weakly. "What are you complaining about? Did you have to choke me so hard? After three days, I still can't swallow. And I've got a busted toe where I hit that doorway."

"Speaking of which," Beth said, "I've got bruises on my arms and legs."

"I couldn't be feeling better." Jo delivered the line perfectly, broke them up.

"We still have to thank you," Beth said, suddenly serious. "What a nightmare!"

"Not thanks, Beth. I couldn't help myself any more than you. I can imagine what you went through; I suspect it was even worse for Jo."

The pretty blonde was startled. "I haven't said anything—"

"The intensity with which you were attracted," Fred broke in. "I didn't know it at the time, but it was the first clue. Women were bound to be more affected."

Charlesworth fingered his jaw again. "Yeah? I thought it was pretty bad."

"You got the full treatment, John, but only for a few minutes. Nevertheless, woman's nature is far more intimately bound up in the life force than man's. What you felt for a short time might have been equivalent to what the girls felt all the time."

The big man shook his head. "Couldn't take it. I'd break . . ." His voice trailed away, and he looked guilty at reminding them.

"We have to face it," Beth said.

"How is he?" Jo asked.

"Lodgesen hasn't changed,"

the captain said gruffly. "He hasn't changed all the time we were in hyper. Just lies in his bunk, crying to go home to mama. It's spooky."

"We'll be home in half a day," Joe said hopefully. "Maybe the psychiatrists can help." Beth and John nodded agreement.

"Possibly, but I don't think so," Fred said. Then a stray wisp of thought brushed his memory—"The eternal pessimist"—made him shudder and hurry on. "From what I remember of psych, he's withdrawn past the point of return. Like so many guys in the physical sciences, he had a streak of insecurity. That's why the categorizing outlook; all data must be fitted into a neat plan. He ran into a bit of data that wouldn't fit; worse, the data turned on him, gave him a sense of security he'd never known. When I jerked us away from the planet, the shock to him must have been similar to the birth trauma. He slipped away from reality. Chances are he'll never come back."

"And the trouble with you guys in the social sciences is too much theorizing on insufficient data!" It was Lodgesen, pale, needing a shave, but otherwise normal.

Charlesworth stood firmly on two feet. "You all right?"

Lodgesen nodded, folded his

thin frame into a chair. "I came out of it. Don't know why. All of a sudden, I was back. Like waking up."

"Everything seems to happen suddenly on the USS Taurus," Beth said lightly, "We're glad, Dick."

Things *did* happen suddenly, Fred thought, too suddenly. I'd better mull this one over . . . He got painfully to his feet. "I've still got some work to do before we land. Excuse me." Then, to Lodgesen: "Take it easy. You've had a shock."

"So have you," the other replied with a wolflike grin, "and you may have others in store."

Fred ignored the remark, limped away. But instinctive bells pealed a warning, one he tried to rationalize away. He wasn't having much success.

In his own cabin, Fred paced rapidly, ignoring the pain in his toe. On the view-forward screen, Earth appeared as a sphere. They were so close . . . The view-aft screen showed nothing but the emptiness of space. Lodgesen's miraculous recovery had shaken him. It didn't add, and the last time something didn't add, there'd been trouble. Incredible as it seemed, he wasn't really sure they'd lost the planet—

*You didn't. You lead me to the population I wanted. I'm getting closer.*

Fred trembled, tried to collect himself to fight.

*You can't fight. You've lost already. Observe: even weak contact with the mind of that other animal made it function normally. Soon I'll be close enough to exert full control over the others again.*

"What are you going to do?" Fred asked.

*Before I'm through, I shall convince all of the intelligences on your dead planet to join me. They'll know it's a much better, richer world.*

"But it isn't!" he almost shrieked. "You can't support that many people."

*True. Many will die. And I'll be able to replenish the energy I've used following you.*

"The race will revert to savagery, possibly even lower, to the caves."

*That is not important, except that the life span will drop. This will create more life force for me. You argue in my favor.*

Fred was aware of an urgent knocking at the door. He opened it, found Jo leaning weakly against the frame.

"Fred," the girl spoke slowly, "help me . . . the nightmare's back . . . help all of us." She was crying, and her eyes were caves of dark terror. He held her tightly, and she sagged against him. "I can't hold out . . . the

others have gone under . . . a miracle, Fred—"

*I'll take this one now; I am strong enough.*

" . . . need a mir—" Jo stiffened, spoke firmly. "I'm going back to my friends. If you're silly enough not to want New Earth, I can't help you." She left, striding purposefully.

"Damn you. Damn you!" Fred's voice was hard, cold. Man, the artist, and man, the hunter, stood helpless before this power. But man, the toolmaker—he bent his environment. That was it! The different faces of man, the ambivalent. That was it! The pieces were in place.

"Earth!" he called piercingly. "Earth, you are one like this other planet. Help us!"

*Stop!* The hated sound beat at him.

And then he heard a new voice, an aged crone: *Can't. Too old.*

"This new one will take us from you," Fred went on, "just as you took us from Alpha Centauri IV. Help us now."

*Can't. It would mean my death. All my reserves of life force.*

Fred heard noise in the corridor outside. There could be only one reason why they'd come—New Earth would prevent his action by killing him.

Desperate now, Fred tried once more. "Earth, die if you must! Die for the 46 other popu-

lations that died for you. Your life is almost over; ours has just begun. You owe us something. We battled our way up from nothingness; you held us back. Because of you, we hated one another. Fought. Killed. We could have been creating—"

The door burst open. Four things, lacking any semblance of reason, advanced on him.

*Now you'll stop!* The new planet's voice was vibrant, confident.

"Earth! Give us back our lives—"

Fred went down under the rush of Charlesworth and Lodgesen. Fingernails—what used to be feminine—tore at his face. A foot crashed into his ribs. Then, as fast as it had begun, the torment stopped.

He raised his head, saw the two screens. In view aft, the intruder planet was barely visible; Earth definitely seen in view forward. Neither changed appearance, but Fred's four companions, held in stasis, were an indication. A cosmic battle raged, an impossible mental battle: age versus youth, weakness versus strength, experience versus inexperience.

Suddenly, the four came at him again. He hadn't the power to resist. What was the use? We've lost again; shall we lose always?

*No . . . you've won . . . use the gift wisely.* As the voice faded out, the view-aft screen flared brilliantly with sudden energy released from a destroyed planet.

There was nothing but the sound of heavy breathing.

Fred tried to raise himself to a sitting position, sank back. Then Jo was cradling him. Her tears, he thought, mixed well with her laughter.

"You did help. However you managed it, you saved the five of us. Are you all right?"

Fred smiled at her. "I'm all right; we all are."

They were picking themselves up—except for one. A thin bundle, curled in a corner, it cried forlornly for its mother.

Jo pointed. "Dick isn't all right."

"He will be." Fred felt mental chains slipping from him. "We'll find a way, now. Don't you see, Jo? That cry is one of a new-born. Our mission was accomplished. The trajectory to Taurus did find life—ours, and it's all ahead of us . . ."

THE END

# THE AUTO HAWKS

By  
**ARTHUR PORGES**

THEY came from the Santa Ana hills. You couldn't have found a better man to explain the whole thing. I was Professor of Zoology at Cal Tech then. Emeritus, now. Light up, and I'll give you the real facts. The so-called histories are wrong on many details.

One thing is certain; the hawks appeared right here in California first. May, 1965—that's almost the exact date of the start. They branched out fast enough, but were most successful in the West, for reasons you'll see. It's a bit ironical, too, that California, which claims to have the largest this, and most gigantic that, isn't too proud of its most authentic giants.

The first attack occurred in May of 1965, as I've said. I have the account in my notebook. All science begins with somebody's jottings, incidentally. Because of

*There was always some risk to driving a car in California. But there was plenty of room on freeways after the monstrous birds swooped down out of the sky.*

my complete, detailed records, I was able to pick out the clues that led to a solution.

The joke is, nobody believed the original report. Reminds me of the Wright Brothers' experience, when it took months for the few witnesses, reputable as they were, to make people in other parts of the country accept the fact that something tremendous happened at Kitty Hawk.

About ten persons saw this auto-hawk in action. They were in the three cars just behind the victim, on the El Toro Road. The only reason the "News" printed their account, I suspect, is that the Liars' Club was meeting then in Los Angeles, and it seemed to fit in. But anyhow these people all agreed that this monster hawk, the size of a bomber, came swooping down and snatched that new Chrysler smack off the road. Frankly, in

their place, I wouldn't have had the nerve to tell anybody, least of all a reporter. You could get put away for sticking to a story like that.

But actually they were safe in talking, since verification came fast. Before long, many people had seen the automobile hawks at work, and the doubters got squelched. When your own Aunt Lil or nephew Ricky was involved, that settled it. Back East, at first, they were more skeptical; there was the usual talk about L. A. as an open-air booby-hatch.

The hawks multiplied fast—optimal conditions, biologists call it. You've seen a few photos and mounted specimens, but not many people remember how they flew. They were a lot like ordinary hawks, except for size. They'd hover, rocking in the updraft, and you'd see the sun flash red on the flanges of their tails as they banked, graceful and smooth. Then a lightning, precise swoop, just like a sparrow hawk taking a mouse. To an ornithologist, especially an underpaid professor who was still driving a 1959 heap, there were worse sights than a big, handsome hawk whistling down to scoop a \$6,000 convertible off the highway!

Lord! The questions the whole situation raised. First, what in blazes did a hawk want with an

auto? And where did they acquire such a taste all of a sudden? It couldn't be instinct, you see.

Well, as for the taste, we learned later that the birds picked it up around some used car graveyards in the area of Los Angeles and its environs. A few young ones brought up on such—ah—Detroit carrion, shall we say?—that was the genesis.

For a while nobody took it too seriously. With hundreds of people killed daily in crashes, the few cars grabbed by auto hawks didn't seem to matter much. After all, it was obvious that the big birds weren't after people as such. A few died through falling from their cars when the hawks hoisted them; but before long California drivers learned that when you heard a mighty swoosh through the air, it was best to pull over and pile out—but fast. You couldn't teach the breed to observe speed laws, or lay off the popskull before driving, but this they learned in a hurry. Even the wild kids.

I think the first real squawks of anguish came from the used car dealers. It seems that young hawks, many of them raised on junked cars and not too sure of their powers, preferred to raid the lots. It was the easiest target—no timing required. A young bird could easily miss its first dive at a fast-moving car on

the road. And such a blunder could hurt, since like as not the car behind would bat him in the tail feathers. Quite a few were crippled that way.

Now, by this time, with the menace snowballing, we—the biologists—were learning some amazing things about these unique birds. As I said, they were breeding in considerable numbers here in the Santa Ana hills. I ask you, what part of the country offered more to an auto hawk than Southern California. Talk about ideal conditions! As you'll see, those brushy hills were vital; in less sheltered places, with a different climate—political and geographical—man would soon have the upper hand. Here, the birds had it.

Gradually, ornithologists and ranchers began to accumulate data. There was no question about the motive any more: the hawks were actually *eating* automobiles. Or I should say parts of them. There was one big fellow with a barred tail, for example, that wouldn't touch anything but hoods. He'd snatch a car off the highway, carry it up about half a mile, and then drop it on the rocks by Seal Point. Every half hour, almost, you'd hear the crash. Like a sea gull with clams. Then he'd hustle down and pick over the pieces, especially bits of the hood. Others went for dashboards, panels, or what have you.

But never any of the metal parts—that was so significant we should have caught it earlier. A few birds preferred tires, even though they meant hard work. The hawks had remarkably powerful bills, but even so, ripping off the casing—all wire and tough synthetic rubber good for five million miles—to get at the inside, was a tiresome, lengthy chore.

On the whole, there was bound to be a lot of waste, too. No hawk ever ate more than, say, fifteen per cent of each car. And they wouldn't bother with each other's leavings either. Unfortunately, the other eighty-five per cent wasn't worth salvaging after hitting the rocks from two thousand feet up. Yes, the birds were fussy, and why not? The roads were literally choked with cars, so they could take their pick. Besides, like any healthy predator, they enjoyed attacking moving objects.

Nowadays, years after, people ask why more wasn't done. Well, to begin with, it would have been reasonable, on the surface, to get some planes from the armed forces and blow hell out of the nests, either with bombs or rockets. If that could have been done early enough, the whole business might have been prevented.

But it wasn't quite that simple

—politics, among other things, were involved. You know what ranchers in California suffer from fires. These long, dry summers have always been murder. Can you imagine them letting a bunch of fly-boys start blazes on every brushy hill in the Santa Ana range? Places it was almost impossible to reach with fire-fighting equipment? The farmers and ranchers didn't care a damn about the motorists—mostly tourists, anyhow—and they raised such hell in Sacramento that the governor called off the planes.

Oh, a few of the hawks were shot down, in the beginning, by naval airmen out on patrols; they were a pushover for jet fighters and rockets; but the birds began taking it out on transports and private planes. Don't ask me if they figured it out logically; I don't know. Maybe they got a hate on against planes, but found that only certain kinds could be tackled with any chance of success. I do know this: gradually there was a kind of truce. If the jets didn't kill any hawks for a few days, the commercial planes weren't bothered. The missile bases got in some good target practice, but the government howled. The birds weren't fast enough to double for enemy rockets, and cost \$200,000 each. It just didn't

make sense, economically. So all this wasn't helping the guy who drove all the way from Ham Hocks, Indiana, to see Liz Taylor's house.

Not that Californians gave up the fight. All sorts of schemes were tried. Used car dealers had the simplest problem. It's easy to protect a lot, where all the cars are concentrated in a small area, and motionless. Before long all the "Saintly Sams" and "Noble Nudelmans" in California had war surplus 50 caliber machine guns strategically spotted in all their lots, and the hawks learned to stay away.

But the best most motorists could manage was a 12-gauge shotgun, and it took a sharpshooter with a cool head to get a hawk that came hurtling down from nowhere at 150 miles an hour. A brain shot was necessary, otherwise Mr. Hawk just combed the pellets out of his feathers and kept coming. And if you didn't stop the bird, there was no time to scramble out of the car, which could mean your finish. There were human remains as well as those of cars on the rocks. So individuals didn't fight back to any extent; it just didn't pay.

Then people tried the convoy system. A few armored cars would herd fifty or sixty autos along Highway 101. But although it worked perfectly, after

a few hawks had been blasted, nobody liked the system except the Nervous Nellies. They just didn't care to follow a time table, all rolling along at fifty. Junior couldn't always wait to relieve himself; Martha was starving, and the group wasn't due to stop for an hour. Besides, not all of them wanted to stay on 101.

So there were enough cars on the smaller roads at all times to feed a million hawks.

The birds got even fussier and more arrogant. There was one undersized devil—runt of the nest, probably—that went for the little cars. I used to watch him with my binoculars from the biology office at the college. He had a nest right there—yes, under that reddish boulder just below the crest. He ate nothing but Isettas, so help me—what part I never knew. One day I saw him carry out a real coup—an Isetta in each foot, something that couldn't happen with big cars. One of the drivers fired a whole pistol-full at him, but the gun was only a 22 from the sound of it, and the poor fool might just as well have tried spit-balls.

There were other, obvious expedients. A few cars were booby-trapped with explosives, and blasted some hawks. But that was picayune stuff. People tied bags of arsenic in strategic places on their cars, too. They

may have killed a handful of birds. But most families have children, and if you have any poison within a mile of a child, he'll manage to eat it. The same child who won't eat his nice healthy dinner for anything! So most people didn't mess with poison, either.

It got to the point where the only safe vehicles were busses—their business was phenomenal that year—and small stuff: bicycles, scooters—as well as the big trucks, although once in a while an ambitious red-tail might tip over an empty.

As I've said, hunting them with planes wasn't practicable. You can't send a Mach 2 jet cavorting around between rocky peaks. If the hawk had sense enough to hug the passes, which most of them learned to do soon, no plane could get at him; and even with a clear shot, the pilot didn't dare fire because of all the dry brush waiting to go up in smoke. True, the rainy season was coming, but by that time we had the answer anyway. In the East, of course, jets did a good job of clean-up.

One bright spot was the fact that the hawks didn't fly at night. If there'd been any auto owls, that would have been rough. As it was, you could drive safely after dark.

Well, the ending is better known than the beginning, so I won't drag it out. My notes gave me the first clue, which was the absolute immunity of cars built before 1962. I had to find out why this was so. What changes, if any, had occurred in that year? At that point, the clue became a mile-high finger-post.

You may not remember, a young fellow like you, how we suffered from crop surpluses, but they were a terrible problem. There were hundreds of huge warehouses bulging with tons of wheat and corn; the maintenance of such places was in itself a heavy financial burden.

Then, in 1961, a chemist at the University of Chicago discovered how to make a cheap, attractive plastic from these surplus grains. It was ideal for auto construction. There had been plastic-bodied sport-cars before, but always in the luxury class. Now a body moulded of Flexine was cast for almost nothing compared to other materials. The government was delighted to sell the wheat and corn without ruining farm prices, and our crop surplus problem disappeared.

Well, that was the first clue. Naturally, a plastic made of grain could be highly nutritious, but not enough, it would seem, to make giants out of ordinary birds.

I got a grant, and went deeper into the problem with the Chemistry Department. We analyzed hundreds of samples of Flexine before realizing what we were looking for.

Nowadays everybody knows about gibberellin, the growth element discovered in the 1950's. Even in 1960 it was being used to produce larger wheat and corn plants—in spite of the surplus. Well, gibberellin was present in Flexine, but certainly, we thought, in too small quantities to have such an effect on the hawks. The percent of the stuff was well under two-tenths, but other material in the Flexine acted as a booster.

The whole picture was now clear. Hungry young hawks, during a year of high rabbit mortality, nibbled plastic in auto graveyards. The gibberellin and booster made them into giants, and they turned to snatching cars off the road.

The solution was easy. Gibberellin was processed out of the plastic, and the next generation of hawks were normal in size. They could eat all of the stuff they could get, now, but it wouldn't make them grow any more than rabbit or mouse meat.

And that's the whole story, young fellow. The scourge lasted only eleven months, but this country will never forget the Year of the Hawks. **THE END**

# Contest Memo From The Editor

IF YOU would like to enter a contest in which there are no prizes whatsoever, we have a thing for you. There is always a lot of comment in our office (we work for a publisher who puts out a lot of other "sensible" magazines) about "those nuts in science-fiction." People come in to stare at our covers as if they really *did* come from outer space.

The cover on this issue drew more unsolicited intramural comments than any we've had recently. Apart from the observations which cannot be spelled any more approximately than "Ulp!" or "Slurph!" there were a few that were reasonably funny. After a while we decided to hold a Ziff-Davis contest for the best captions to go with this Nuetzell creation. For your amusement and edification, the winners (to give you an example of the prizes, the first prize was a lock of Cele Goldsmith's hair) turned out to be, in order of reverse brilliance:

- 1—"I Wasn't Hungry, But, Well, Just One More."
- 2—"I Have a Feeling I'm Smoking This From the Wrong End."
- 3—"Spaceships R in Season."
- 4—"It Only Tickles When I Swallow."
- 5—"What This Universe Needs Is a Good 5¢ Spaceship."
- 6—"Missiles Taste Good . . . Like a Cigarette Should."
- 7—"Tell Those Kids to Stop Throwing Things Inside the House!"
- 8—"Doctor, Are You Sure This Will Cure My Earache?"
- 9—"Good Evening, Nikita, the Boys Are Waiting Inside."

If you have any better ideas—and I don't see how you can help it—send 'em along. We'll run a little contest of our own. And no lock of Cele's hair to the winner either. (She can't afford to lose any more, frankly.) For the caption that most tickles our editorial risibilities, one free subscription to *Amazing*. Deadline for entries: Sept. 7. Judges' decision final. In case of duplicate entries first postmark wins. And all that there kind of legal stuff.

Fire away!



# OMEGA!

By  
**ROBERT  
SHECKLEY**

ILLUSTRATOR GRAYAM

*This novel will be published in the fall by Signet Books under the title "The Status Civilization."*

## SYNOPSIS

Number 420 had no memories when he woke up in the cell of a spaceship. Then they told him his name was Will Barrent, that he was a murderer, and that his punishment was exile to Omega, the prison planet where everyone was a criminal, evil was the rule, and the average life expectancy was three years.

Barrent could know nothing. Yet a recurrent dream convinced him he was not a killer. He determined to find out more about both Omega and himself. He found that newly-arrived men were fair game on Landing Day. But a strange girl gave him a gun, and Barrent killed the man who was ready to kill him. Under

*(Conclusion)*

the law, Barrent inherited the man's possessions—mainly a busy shop that sold antidotes for poisons. Poisoning was a common affair on Omega.

Neither religion nor drug-induced dreams brought Barrent any closer to the secret of his search for his own background. He dropped both church and Dream Shop and was promptly arrested for impiety and non-drug addiction. The penalty: mutilation or Trial by Ordeal. Barrent chose the Ordeal, and the guards snickered. He was led at once to a circular stone room; one part of the wall was cut away for a spectators' seating section: among them was the beautiful girl who had loaned him the gun on his first day in Omega.

Barrent duels a machine—a four-foot-high half-sphere, rolling on wheels. It can kill 23 different ways; random impulses change the method of murder every one to six seconds. Barrent must find the one way to disable the machine during the split-second when it pauses to switch weapons. Barrent avoids a knife, poison, a club, a hatchet. But he is running himself into exhaustion. Desperate, Barrent sees the girl quickly make a turning motion with her hands. As the machine charges he throws himself under its wheels and heaves upward. He turns the machine on

its back, pries off the cover of a fuse box and removes a fuse. The machine dies, and Barrent falls to the floor, unconscious.

## CHAPTER 11

ON Omega, the law is supreme. Hidden and revealed, sacred and profane, the law governs the actions of all citizens, from the lowest of the low to the highest of the high. Without the law, there could be no privileges for those who made the law; therefore the law was absolutely necessary. Without the law and its stern enforcement, Omega would be an unthinkable chaos in which a man's rights could extend only as far and as long as he personally could enforce them. This anarchy would mean the end of Omegan society; and particularly, it would mean the end of those senior citizens of the ruling class who had grown high in status, but whose skill with a gun had long passed its peak.

Therefore the law was necessary.

But Omega was also a criminal society, composed entirely of individuals who had broken the laws of Earth. It was a society which, in the final analysis, stressed individual endeavor. It was a society in which the law-breaker was king; a society in which crimes were not only condoned but were admired, and

even rewarded; a society in which deviation from the rules was judged solely on its degree of success.

And this resulted in the paradox of a criminal society with absolute laws which were meant to be broken.

The judge, still hidden behind his screen, explained all this to Barrent. Several hours had passed since the end of the Trial by Ordeal. Barrent had been taken to the infirmary, where his injuries were patched up. They were minor, for the most part; a broken left arm, two cracked ribs, a deep gouge in his left shoulder, and various cuts and bruises.

"Accordingly," the judge went on, "the law must simultaneously be broken and not broken. Those who never break a law never rise in status. They are usually killed off in one way or another, since they lack the necessary initiative to survive. For those who, like yourself, break laws, the situation is somewhat different. The law punishes them with absolute severity—*unless they can get away with it.*"

The judge paused. In an almost dreamy voice he continued, "Obviously, the highest type of man bred upon Omega is the man who understands the laws, appreciates their necessity, knows the penalties if he breaks them, breaks them anyhow—and gets

away with it! That, sir, is your ideal criminal and your ideal Omegan. And that is what you have succeeded in doing, Will Barrent, by winning the Trial by Ordeal."

"Thank you, sir," Barrent said.

"I wish you to understand," the judge continued, "that success in breaking the law once does not imply that you will succeed a second time. The odds are increasingly against you each time you try—just as the rewards are increasingly greater if you succeed. Therefore I counsel you not to act rashly upon your new acquisition of knowledge."

"I won't, sir," Barrent said.

"Very well. You are hereby elevated to the status of Privileged Citizen, with all the rights and obligations which that entails. You are allowed to keep your business, as before. Furthermore, you are granted a week's free vacation in the Lake of Clouds region; and you may go on that vacation with any female of your choice."

"I beg pardon?" Barrent said. "What was that last?"

"A week's vacation," the hidden judge repeated, "with any female of your choice. It is a high reward, since men outnumber women on Omega by six to one. You may pick any woman, married or single, willing or unwilling. I will grant you three

days in which to make a choice."

"I don't need three days," Barrent said. "I want the girl who was sitting in the front row of the spectator's gallery. The girl with black hair and green eyes. Do you know which one I mean?"

"Yes," the judge said slowly, "I know which one you mean. Her name is Moera Ermais. I suggest that you choose someone else."

"Is there any reason why I can't have her?"

"No. But you would be much better advised if you selected someone else. My clerk will be pleased to furnish you with a list of suitable young ladies. All of them have affidavits of good performance. Several are graduates of the Womens Institute, which, as you perhaps know, gives a rigorous two-year course in the geishan arts and sciences. I can personally recommend your attention to—"

"Moera is the one I want," Barrent said.

"Young man, you err in your judgment."

"I'll have to take that chance."

"Very well," the judge said. "Your vacation starts at nine tomorrow morning. I sincerely wish you good fortune."

Guards escorted Barrent from the judge's chambers, and he was taken back to his shop. His friends, who had been waiting

for the death announcement, came to congratulate him. They were eager to hear the complete details of the Trial by Ordeal; but Barrent had learned now that secret knowledge was the road to power. He gave them only the sketchiest outline.

There was another cause for celebration that night. Tom Rend's application had finally been accepted by the Assassin's Guild. As he had promised, he was taking Foeren on as his assistant.

The following morning, Barrent opened his shop and saw a vehicle in front of his door. It had been provided for his vacation by the Department of Justice. Sitting in the back, looking beautiful and very annoyed, was Moera.

She said, "Are you out of your mind, Barrent? Do you think I have time for this sort of thing? Why did you pick me?"

"You saved my life," Barrent said.

"And I suppose you think that means I'm interested in you? Well, I'm not. If you have any gratitude, you'll tell the driver that you've changed your mind. You can still choose another girl."

Barrent shook his head. "You're the only girl I'm interested in."

"Then you won't reconsider?"

"Not a chance."

Moera sighed and leaned back.

"Are you *really* interested in me?"

"Much more than interested," Barrent said.

"Well," Moera said, "if you won't change your mind, I suppose I'll just have to put up with you." She turned away; but before she did, Barrent caught the faintest suggestion of a smile.

## CHAPTER 12

THE Lake of Clouds was Omega's finest vacation resort. Upon entering the district, all weapons had to be checked at the main gate. No duels were allowed under any circumstances. Any quarrels were arbitrarily decided by the nearest bartender, and murder was punished by immediate loss of status.

All possible amusements were available at the Lake of Clouds. There were the exhibitions such as fencing bouts, bull fighting, and bear baiting. There were sports like swimming, mountain climbing, and skiing. In the evenings there was dancing in the main ballroom, behind glass walls which separated residents from citizens and citizens from the elite. There was a well-stocked drug bar containing anything the fashionable addict could desire, as well as a few novelties he might wish to sample. For the gregarious, there was an orgy every Wednesday and Saturday

night in the Satyr's Grotto. For the shy, the management arranged masked trysts in the dim passageways beneath the hotel. But most important of all, there were gently rolling hills and shadowy woods to walk in, free from the tensions of the daily struggle for existence in Tetrahyde.

Barrent and Moera had adjoining rooms, and the door between them was unlocked. But on the first night, Barrent did not go through that door. Moera had given no sign of wanting him to do so; and on a planet where women have easy and continual access to poisons, a man had to think twice before inflicting his company where it was not wanted. Even the owner of an Antidote Shop had to consider the possibility of not being able to recognize his own symptoms in time.

On their second day, they climbed high into the hills. They ate a basket lunch on a grassy incline which sloped to the gray sea. After they had eaten, Barrent asked Moera why she had saved his life.

"You won't like the answer," she told him.

"I'd still like to hear it."

"Well, you looked so ridiculously vulnerable that day in the Victim's Society. I would have helped anyone who looked that way."

Barrent nodded uncomfortably. "What about the second time?"

"By then I suppose I had an interest in you. Not a romantic interest, you understand. I'm not at all romantic."

"What kind of an interest?" Barrent asked.

"I thought you might be good recruitment material."

"I'd like to hear more about it," Barrent said.

Moera was silent for a while, watching him with unblinking green eyes. She said, "There's not much I can tell you. I'm a member of an organization. We're always on the lookout for good prospects. Usually we screen directly from the prison ships. After that, recruiters like me go out in search of people we can use."

"What type of people do you look for?"

"Not your type, Will. I'm sorry."

"Why not me?"

"At first I thought seriously about recruiting you," Moera said. "You seemed like just the sort of person we needed. Then I checked into your record."

"And?"

"We don't recruit murderers. Sometimes we employ them for specific jobs, but we don't take them into the organization. There are certain extenuating

circumstances which we recognize; self-defense, for example. But aside from that, we feel that a man who has committed premeditated murder on Earth is the wrong man for us."

"I see," Barrent said. "Would it help any if I told you I don't have the usual Omegan attitude on murder?"

"I know you don't," Moera said. "If it were up to me, I'd take you into the organization. But it's not my choice . . . Will, are you sure you're a murderer?"

"I believe I am," Barrent said. "I probably am."

"Too bad," Moera said. "Still, the organization needs high-survival types, no matter what they did on Earth. I can't promise anything, but I'll see what I can do. It would help if you could find out more about why you committed murder. Perhaps there were extenuating circumstances."

"Perhaps," Barrent said doubtfully. "I'll try to find out."

That evening, just before he went to sleep, Moera opened the adjoining door and came into his room. Slim and warm, she slipped into his bed. When he started to speak, she put a hand over his mouth. And Barrent, who had learned not to question good fortune, kept quiet.

The rest of the vacation passed too quickly. The subject of

the organization did not come up again; but perhaps as compensation, the adjoining door was not closed. At last, late on the seventh day Barrent and Moera were in a car speeding back to Tetrahyde.

"When can I see you again?" Barrent asked.

"I'll get in touch with you."

"That's not a very satisfactory arrangement."

"It's the best I can do," Moera said. "Im sorry, Will. I'll see what I can do about the organization."

Barrent had to be satisfied with that. When the car dropped him at his store, he still didn't know where she lived, or what kind of an organization she represented.

Back in his apartment, he considered carefully the details of his dream in the Dream Shop. It was all there: his anger at Therkaler, the illicit gun, the encounter, the corpse, and then the informer and the judge. Only one thing was missing. He had no recollection of the actual murder, no memory of aiming the gun and pulling the trigger. The dream stopped when he met Therkaler, and started again after he was dead.

Perhaps he had blocked the moment of actual murder out of mind; but perhaps there had been some provocation, some sat-

isfactory reason why he had killed the man. He would have to find out.

There were only two ways of getting information about Earth. One lay through the horror-tinged visions of the Dream Shop, and he was determined not to go there again. The other way was through the services of a skrenning mutant.

Barrent had the usual Ome-gan distaste for mutants. They were another race entirely, and their status of untouchability was no mere prejudice. It was well known that mutants often carried strange and incurable diseases. They were shunned, and they had reacted to exclusion by exclusivity. They lived in the Mutant's Quarter, which was almost a self-contained city within Tetrahyde. Citizens with good sense stayed away from the Quarter, especially after dark; for everyone knew that mutants could be vindictive.

But only mutants had the skrenning ability. In their misshapen bodies were unusual powers and talents, odd and abnormal abilities which the normal man shunned by day but secretly courted by night. Mutants were said to be in the particular favor of The Black One. Some people felt that the great art of Black Magic, about which the priests boasted, could only be performed by a mutant; but

they never said that in the presence of a priest.

Mutants, because of their strange talents, were reputed to remember much more of Earth than was possible for normal men and women. Not only could they remember Earth in general, but in particular they could skren the life-thread of a man backward through space and time, pierce the wall of forgetfulness and tell what really had happened to him.

Other people believed that mutants had no unusual abilities at all. They considered them clever rogues who lived off people's credulity.

Barrent decided to find out for himself. Late one night, suitably cloaked and armed, he left his apartment and went to the Mutant Quarter.

## CHAPTER 13

BARRENT walked through the narrow, twisting streets of the Quarter, one hand on his gun butt, the other hand guarding his wallet. He walked among the lame and the blind, past hydrocephalic and microcephalic idiots, past a juggler who kept twelve flaming torches in the air with the aid of a rudimentary third hand growing out of his chest.

He turned a corner and stopped. A tall, ragged old man with

a cane was blocking his way. The man was half-blind; the skin had grown smooth and hairless over the socket where his left eye should have been. But his right eye was sharp and fierce under a white eyebrow.

"You wish the services of a genuine skrenner?" the old man asked.

Barrent nodded.

"Follow me," the mutant said. He turned into an alley, and Barrent came after him, gripping his gun butt more tightly. Mutants were forbidden by law to carry arms. But like this old man, most of them had heavy, iron-headed walking-sticks. At close quarters, no one could ask for a better weapon.

The old man opened a door and motioned Barrent inside. Barrent paused, thinking about the stories he had heard of gullible citizens falling into mutant hands. Then he half-drew his needlebeam and went inside.

At the end of a long passageway, the old man opened a door and led Barrent into a small, dimly lighted room. As his eyes became accustomed to the dark, Barrent could make out the shapes of two women sitting in front of a plain wooden table. There was a pan of water on the table, and in the pan was a fist-sized piece of glass cut into many facets.

One of the women was very

old, fat, and completely hairless. The other was young and beautiful. As Barrent moved closer to the table, he saw, with a sense of shock, that her legs were joined below the knee by a membrane of scaly skin, and her feet were of a rudimentary fish-tail shape.

"What do you wish us to skren for you, Citizen Barrent?" the young woman asked.

"How did you know my name?" Barrent asked. When he got no answer, he said, "All right. I want to find out about a murder I committed on Earth."

"Why do you want to find out about it?" the young woman asked. "Won't the authorities credit it to your record?"

"They credit it. But I want to find out why I did it. Maybe there were extenuating circumstances. Maybe I did it in self-defense."

"Is it really important?" the young woman asked.

"I think so," Barrent said. He hesitated a moment, then took the plunge. "The fact of the matter is, I have a neurotic prejudice against murder. I would rather *not* kill. So I want to find out why I committed murder on Earth."

The mutants looked at each other. Then the old man grinned and said, "Citizen, we'll help you all we can. We mutants also have a prejudice against killing, since

it's always someone else killing us. We're all in favor of citizens with a neurosis against murder."

"Then you'll skren my past?"

"It's not as easy as that," the young woman said. "The skrenning ability, which is one of a cluster of psi talents, is difficult to use. It doesn't always function. And when it does function, it often doesn't reveal what it's supposed to."

"I thought all mutants could look into the past whenever they wanted to," Barrent said.

"No," the old man told him, "that isn't true. For one thing, not all of us who are classified mutants are true mutants. Almost any deformity or abnormality these days is called mutantism. It's a handy term to cover anyone who doesn't conform to the Terran standard of appearance."

"But some of you are true mutants?"

"Certainly. But even then, there are different types of mutantism. Some just show radiation abnormalities—giantism, microcephaly, and the like. Only a few of us possess the slightest psi abilities—although all mutants claim them."

"Are you able to skren?" Barrent asked him.

"No. But Myla can," he said, pointing to the young woman. "Sometimes she can."

The young woman was staring

into the pan of water, into the faceted glass. Her pale eyes were open very wide, showing almost all pupil, and her fish-tailed body was rigidly upright, supported by the old woman.

"She's beginning to see something," the man said. "The water and the glass are just devices to focus her attention. Myla's really very good at skrenning, though sometimes she gets the future confused with the past. That sort of thing is embarrassing, and it gives skrenning a bad name. It can't be helped, though. Every once in a while the future is there in the water, and Myla has to tell what she sees. Last week she told a Hadji he was going to die in four days." The old man chuckled. "You should have seen the expression on his face."

"Did she see how he would die?" Barrent asked.

"Yes. By a knife-thrust. The poor man stayed in his house for the entire four days."

"Was he killed?"

"Of course. His wife killed him. She was a strong-minded woman, I'm told."

Barrent hoped that Myla wouldn't skren any future for him. Life was bad enough without a mutant's predictions to make it worse.

She was looking up from the faceted glass now, shaking her head sadly. "There's very little I

can tell you. I was not able to see the murder performed. But I skrenned a graveyard, and in it I saw your parents' tombstone. It was an old tombstone, perhaps twenty years old. The graveyard was on the outskirts of a place on Earth called Youngerstun."

So that part of his dream in which he had seen his father had probably been false recall.

"Also," Myla said, "I skrenned a man who knows about the murder. He can tell you about it, if he will."

"This man saw the murder?"

"Yes."

"Is he the man who informed on me?"

"I don't know," Myla said. "I skrenned the corpse, whose name was Therkaler, and there was a man standing near it. That man's name was Illiardi."

"Is he here on Omega?"

"Yes. You can find him right now in the Euphoratorium on Little Axe Street. Do you know where that is?"

"I can find it," Barrent said. He thanked the girl and offered payment, which she refused to take. She looked very unhappy. As Barrent was leaving, she called out, "Be careful."

Barrent stopped at the door, and felt an icy chill settle across his chest. "Did you skren my future?" he asked.

"Only a little," Myla said. "Only a few months ahead."

"What did you see?"

"I can't explain it," she said.

"What I saw is impossible."

"Tell me what it was."

"I saw you dead. And yet, you weren't dead at all. You were looking at a corpse, which was shattered into shiny fragments. But the corpse was also you."

"What does it mean?"

"I don't know," Myla said.

Barrent thanked her again and left, wondering if skrenning mutants were ever wrong in their prophecies.

The Euphoratorium was a large, garish place which specialized in cut-rate drugs and aphrodisiacs. It catered mostly to a peon and resident clientele. Barrent felt out of place as he shouldered his way through the crowd and asked a waiter where he could find a man named Illiardi.

The waiter pointed. In a corner booth, Barrent saw a large, bald, thick-shouldered man sitting over a tiny glass of thanapiquita. Barrent went over and introduced himself.

"Pleased to meet you, sir," Illiardi said, showing the obligatory respect of a Second Class Resident for a Privileged Citizen. "How can I be of service?"

"I want to ask you a few questions about Earth," Barrent said.

"I can't remember much about the place," Illiardi said. "But you're welcome to anything I know."

"Do you remember a man named Therkaler?"

"Sure," Illiardi said. "Thin, foxy-faced fellow. Cross-eyed. As mean a man as you could find."

"Were you present when he was killed?"

"I was there. It was the first thing I remembered when I got off the ship."

"Did you see who killed him?"

Illiardi looked puzzled. "I didn't have to see. *I* killed him."

Barrent forced himself to speak in a calm, steady voice. "Are you sure of that? Are you absolutely certain?"

"Of course I'm sure," Illiardi said. "And I'll fight any man who tries to take credit for it. I killed Therkaler, and he deserved worse than that."

"When you killed him," Barrent asked, "did you see *me* anywhere around?"

Illiardi looked at him carefully, then shook his head. "No, I don't think I saw you. But I can't be sure. Right after I killed Therkaler, everything goes sort of blank."

"Thank you," Barrent said. He left the Euphoratorium.

## CHAPTER 14

BARRENT had a lot to think about, but the more he thought, the more confused he became. If Illiardi had killed Therkaler, why had Barrent been

deported to Omega? If an honest mistake had been made, why hadn't he been released when the true murderer was discovered? Why had someone on Earth accused him of a crime he hadn't committed; and why had a false memory of that crime been superimposed on his mind just beneath the conscious level?

Barrent had no answers for his questions. But he knew that he had never felt like a murderer. Now he had proof, of sorts, that he wasn't a murderer.

The sensation of innocence changed everything for him. He had less tolerance for Omegan ways, and no interest at all in conforming to a criminal mode of life. The only thing he wanted was to escape from Omega and return to his rightful heritage on Earth.

But that was impossible. Day and night, the guardships circled overhead. Even if there had been some way of evading them, escape would still have been impossible. Omegan technology had progressed only as far as the internal combustion engine; the only spaceships were commanded by Earth forces.

Barrent continued to work in the Antidote Shop, but his lack of public spirit was growing apparent. He ignored invitations from the Drug Shop, and never attended any of the popular public executions. When lynch mobs

were formed to have a little fun in the Mutant Quarter, Barrent usually pleaded a headache. He never joined the Landing Day Hunts, and he was rude to an accredited salesman from the Torture of the Month Club. Not even daily visits from Uncle Ingemar could make him change his anti-religious ways.

He knew he was asking for trouble. He expected trouble, and the knowledge was strangely exhilarating. After all, there was nothing wrong in breaking the law on Omega—as long as you could get away with it.

Within a month, he had a chance to test his decision. Walking to his ship one day, a man shoved against him in a crowd. Barrent moved away, and the man grabbed him by a shoulder and pulled him around.

"Who the hell do you think you're pushing?" the man asked. He was short and stocky. His clothes indicated Privileged Citizen's rank. Five silver stars on his gunbelt showed his number of authorized kills.

"I didn't push you," Barrent said.

"The hell you didn't, *mutant-lover*."

The crowd became silent when they heard the deadly insult. Barrent backed away, waiting. The man went for his sidearm in a quick, artistic draw. But Barrent's needlebeam was out a

full half-second before the man had cleared his holster.

He drilled the man neatly between the eyes; then, sensing movement behind him, he swung around.

Two Privileged Citizens were drawing heat guns. Barrent fired, aiming automatically, dodging behind the protection of a shop-front. The men crumpled. The wooden front buckled under the impact of a projectile weapon, and splinters slashed his hand. Barrent saw a fourth man firing at him from an alley. He brought the man down with two shots.

And that was that. In the space of a few seconds, he had killed four men.

Although he didn't think of himself as having a murderer's mentality, Barrent was pleased and elated. He had fired only in self-defense. He had given the status-seekers something to think about; they wouldn't be so quick to gun for him next time. Quite possible they would concentrate on easier targets and leave him alone.

When he returned to his shop, he found Joe waiting for him. The little credit-thief had a sour look on his face. He said, "I saw your fancy gunwork today. Very pretty."

"Thank you," Barrent said.

"Do you think that sort of

thing will help you? Do you think you can just go on breaking the law?"

"I'm getting away with it," Barrent said.

"Sure. But how long do you think you can keep it up?"

"As long as I have to."

"Not a chance," Joe said. "Nobody keeps on breaking the law and getting away with it. Only suckers believe that."

"They'd better send some good men after me," Barrent said, reloading his needlebeam.

"That's not how it'll happen," Joe said. "Believe me, Will, there's no counting the ways they have of getting you. Once the law decides to move, there'll be nothing you can do to stop it. And don't expect any help from that girl friend of yours, either."

"Do you know her?" Barrent asked.

"I know everybody," Joe said moodily. "I've got friends in the government. I know that people have had about enough of you. Listen to me, Will. Do you want to end up dead?"

Barrent shook his head. "Joe, can you visit Moera? Do you know how to contact her?"

"Maybe," Joe said. "What for?"

"I want you to tell her something," Barrent said. "I want you to tell her that I didn't commit the murder I was accused of on Earth."

Joe stared at him. "Are you out of your mind?"

"No. I found the man who actually did it. He's a Second Class Resident named Illiardi."

"Why spread it around?" Joe asked. "No sense in losing credit for the kill."

"I didn't murder the man," Barrent said. "I want you to tell Moera. Will you?"

"Sure, I'll tell her," Joe said. "If I can locate her. Look, will you remember what I've said? Maybe you still have time to do something about it. Go to Black Mass or something. It might help."

"Maybe I'll do that," Barrent said. "You'll be sure to tell her?"

"I'll tell her," Joe said. He left the Antidote Shop shaking his head sadly.

## CHAPTER 15

THREE days later, Barrent received a visit from a tall, dignified old man who stood as rigidly erect as the ceremonial sword that hung by his side. The old man wore a high-collared coat, black pants and gleaming black boots. From his clothing, Barrent knew he was a high government official. Perhaps this was the reckoning he expected.

"The government of Omega sends you greetings," said the official. "I am Norins Jay, sub-minister of Games. I am here

to inform you of your good fortune."

Barrent nodded warily and invited the old man into his apartment. But Jay, erect and proper, preferred to stay in the store.

"The yearly Lottery drawing was held last night," Jay said. "You, Citizen Barrent, are one of the prize winners. I congratulate you."

"What is the prize?" Barrent asked. He had heard of the yearly Lottery, and had some idea of its significance. But he wanted to get all information possible from this official.

"The prize," Jay said, "is honor and fame. Your name will be inscribed on the civic rolls. Your record of kills will be preserved for posterity. More concretely, you will receive a new government-issue needlebeam, and afterwards you will be awarded posthumously the silver sunburst decoration."

"Posthumously? After death, you mean?"

"Of course," Jay said. "The silver sunburst is always awarded after death. It is no less an honor for that."

"I'm sure it isn't," Barrent said. "Is there anything else?"

"Just one other thing," Jay said. "As a Lottery winner, you will take part in the symbolic ceremony of the Hunt, which marks the beginning of the yearly Games. The Hunt, as you may

know, personifies our Omegan way of life. In the Hunt we see all the complex factors of the dramatic rise and fall from grace, combined with the thrill of the duel and the excitement of the chase. Even peons are allowed to participate in the Hunt, for this is the one holiday open to all, and the one holiday that symbolizes the common man's ability to rise above the restraint of his status."

"If I understand correctly," Barrent said, "you mean I'm one of the people who have been chosen to be hunted. Is that right?"

"Yes," Jay said.

"But you said the ceremony is symbolic. Doesn't that mean nobody gets killed?"

"Not at all!" Jay said. "On Omega, the symbol and the thing symbolized are usually the same. When we say a Hunt, we mean a true hunt. Otherwise the thing would be mere empty pageantry."

Barrent stopped a moment to consider the situation. It was not a pleasing prospect. In a man-to-man duel, he had an excellent chance of survival. But the yearly Hunt, in which the entire population of Tetrahyde took part, gave him no chance at all. He should have been ready for a possibility like this.

"How was I picked?" he asked.

"By pure random selection," said Norins Jay. "No other method would be fair to the Hunters, who give up their lives for Omega's greater glory."

"I can't believe I was picked purely by chance."

"The selection was random," Jay said. "It was made, of course, from a list of suitable victims. Not everybody can be a Quarry in a Hunt. A man must have demonstrated a considerable degree of tenacity, toughness, and skill before the Games Committee would even consider him for selection. Being Hunted is an honor; it is not one which we confer lightly."

"To hell with that," Barrent said. "You people in the government were out to get me. Now you've succeeded. It's as simple as that."

"It isn't simple at all. I can assure you that none of us in the government bear you the slightest ill will. You may have heard foolish stories about vindictive officials, but they simply aren't true. You have broken the law, but that is no longer the government's concern. Now it is entirely a matter between you and the law."

Jay's frosty blue eyes flashed when he spoke of the law. His back stiffened, and his mouth grew firm.

"The law," he said, "is above the criminal and the judge, and

rules them both. Even when you violate the law, it is the law which you are violating; and therefore your actions are still in terms of the law. The law is inescapable, for an action is either lawful or unlawful. The law, indeed, may be said to have a life of its own, an existence quite apart from the finite lives of the beings who administer it. The law governs every aspect of human behavior; therefore, to the same extent that men are lawful beings, the law is human. And being human, the law has its idiosyncracies, just as a man has his. For a citizen who abides by the law, the law is distant and difficult to find. For those who reject and violate it, the law emerges from its musty sepulchres and goes in search of the transgressor."

"And that," Barrent said, "is why I was chosen for the Hunt?"

"Of course," Jay said. "If you had not been chosen in that way, the zealous and never-sleeping law would have selected another means, using whatever instruments were at its disposal."

"Thanks for telling me," Barrent said. "How long do I have before the Hunt begins?"

"Until dawn. The Hunt begins then, and ends at dawn of the following day."

"What happens if I'm not killed?"

Norins Jay smiled faintly. "That doesn't happen often, Citizen Barrent. I'm sure it need not worry you."

"It happens sometimes, doesn't it?"

"Yes. Those who survive the Hunt are automatically enrolled in the Games."

"And if I survive the Games?"

"Forget it," Jay said in a friendly manner.

"But what if I do?"

"Believe me, Citizen, you won't."

"I still want to know what happens if I do."

"Those who live through the Games are beyond the law."

"That sounds good," Barrent said.

"It isn't. The law, even at its most threatening, is still your guardian. Your rights may be few, but the law guarantees their observance. It is because of the law that I do not kill you right now." Jay opened his hand, and Barrent saw a tiny single-shot gun in it. "The law sets limits and acts as a modifier upon the behavior of the lawbreaker and the law enforcer. To be sure, the law now states that you must die. But all men must die. The law, by its ponderous and introspective nature, gives you time in which to die. You have a day at least; and without the law, you would have no time at all."

"What happens," Barrent asked, "if I survive the Games and pass beyond the law?"

"There is only one thing beyond the law," Norins Jay said, "and that is The Black One himself. Those who pass beyond the law belong to him. But it would be better to die a thousand times than to fall living into the hands of The Black One."

Barrent had long ago dismissed the religion of The Black One as superstitious nonsense. But now, listening to Jay's earnest voice, he began to wonder. There might be a difference between the commonplace worship of evil, and the actual presence of Evil itself.

"But if you have any luck," Jay said, "you will be killed before anything like that can happen to you. Now I will end the interview with your final instructions."

Still holding the tiny gun, Jay reached into a pocket with his free hand and withdrew a red pencil. In a quick, practiced motion he drew the pencil over Barrent's cheeks and forehead. He was finished before Barrent had time to recoil.

"That marks you as one of the Hunted," Jay said. "The huntmarks are indelible. Here is your government-issue needlebeam." He drew a weapon from his pocket and put it on the table. "The Hunt, as I told you, begins

at first light of dawn. Anyone may kill you then, except another Hunted man. You may kill in return. But I suggest that you do so with the utmost circumspection. The sound and flash of their guns have given many Hunteds away. If you try concealment, be sure you have an exit. Remember that others know Tetrahyde better than you. Skilled Hunters have explored all the possible hiding places over the years, and too many of the Hunted are trapped during the first hours of the holiday. Good luck, Citizen Barrent."

Jay walked to the door. He opened it and turned to Barrent again.

"There is, I might add, one way of preserving both life and liberty during the Hunt. But, since it is illegal, I cannot tell you what it is."

Jay bowed and went out.

Barrent found, after repeated washings, that the crimson huntmarks on his face were indeed indelible. During the evening, he disassembled the government-issue needlebeam and inspected its parts. As he had suspected, the weapon was defective. He discarded it in favor of his own gun.

He made his preparations for the Hunt, putting food, water, a coil of rope, a knife, extra ammunition and a spare needlebeam

into a small knapsack. Then he waited, hoping against all reason that Moera and her organization would bring him a last-minute reprieve.

But no reprieve came. An hour before dawn, Barrent shouldered his knapsack and left the Anti-dote Shop. He had no idea what the other Hunteds were doing; but he had already decided on a place that might be secure from the Hunters.

## CHAPTER 16

AUTHORITIES on Omega agree that a Hunted man experiences a change of character. If he were able to look upon the Hunt as an abstract problem, he might arrive at certain more or less valid conclusions. But the typical Hunted, no matter how great his intelligence, cannot divorce emotion from his reasoning. After all, *he* is being hunted. He becomes panic-stricken. Safety seems to lie in distance and depth. He goes as far from home as possible; he goes deep into the ground along the subterranean maze of sewers and conduits. He chooses darkness instead of light, empty places in preference to crowded ones.

This behavior is well known to experienced Hunters. Quite naturally, they look first in the dark, empty places, in the underground passageways, in deserted

stores and buildings. Here they find and flush the Hunted, with a sad and inexorable precision.

Barrent had thought about this. He had discarded his first instinct, which was to hide in the intricate Tetrahyde sewer system. Instead, an hour before dawn, he went directly to the large, brightly lighted building that housed the Ministry of Games.

When the corridors seemed to be deserted, he entered quickly, read the directory, and climbed the stairs to the third floor. He passed a dozen office doors, and finally stopped at the one marked *Norins Jay, Sub-Minister of Games*. He listened for a moment, then opened the door and stepped in.

There was nothing wrong with old Jays' reflexes. Before Barrent was through the doorway, the old man had spotted the crimson hunt-marks on his face. Jay opened a drawer and reached for a gun.

Barrent had no desire to kill the old man. He flung the government-issue needlebeam at Jay, and caught him full on the forehead. Jay staggered back against the wall, then collapsed to the floor.

Bending over him, Barrent found that his pulse was strong. He bound and gagged the sub-minister, and pushed him out of sight under his desk. Hunting

through the drawers, he found a *Do Not Disturb* sign. He hung this outside the door, and locked it. With his own needlebeam drawn, he sat down behind the desk and waited to see what would happen.

Dawn came, and a watery sun rose over Omega. From the window, Barrent could see the streets filled with people. There was a hectic carnival atmosphere in the city, and the noise of the holiday celebration was punctuated by the occasional hiss of a beamer of the flat explosion of a projectile weapon.

By noon, Barrent was still undetected. He looked through the windows, and found that he had access to the roof. He was glad to have an exit, just as Jay had suggested.

By mid-afternoon, Jay had recovered consciousness. After struggling with his bonds for a while, he lay quietly under the desk. There was nothing else he could do.

Just before evening, someone knocked at the door. "Minister Jay, may I come in?"

"Not right now," Barrent said, in what he hoped was a fair imitation of Jay's voice.

"All right," the man said. "I just thought you'd be interested in the statistics of the Hunt. So far, the Citizens have killed seventy-three Hunteds, with eight-

een left to go. That's quite an improvement over last year."

"Yes, it is," Barrent said.

"The percentage who hid in the sewer system was larger this year. A few tried to bluff it out by staying in their homes. We're tracking down the rest in the usual places."

"Good," said Barrent.

"None have made the real break so far," the man said. "Strange that Hunteds rarely think of it. But of course, it saves us from having to use the machines."

"Yes," Barrent said, wondering what the man was talking about. The break? Where was there to break to? And how would machines be used?

"We're already selecting alternates for the Games," the man said. "I'd like to have your approval of the list."

"Use your own judgment," Barrent said.

"Yes sir," the man said. In a moment, Barrent heard his footsteps moving down the hall. He decided that the man had become suspicious. The conversation had lasted too long, he should have broken it off earlier. Perhaps he should move to a different office.

Before he could do anything, there was a heavy pounding at the door.

"Who's there?"

"Citizen's Search Committee," a bass voice answered. "Please

open the door. A clerk gave us reason to believe that a Hunted is hiding in there."

"Nonsense," Barrent said. "There's no one here but me. This is a government office. You can't come in."

"We can," the bass voice said. "No room, office or building is closed to a Citizen on Hunt Day. Are you opening up?"

Barrent had already moved to the window. He opened it, and heard behind him the sound of men hammering at the door. He fired through the door twice to give them something to think about; then he climbed out through the window.

The rooftops of Tetrahyde, Barrent saw at once, looked like a perfect place for a Hunted; therefore they were the last place a Hunted should be. The maze of closely connected roofs, chimneys and spires seemed made to order for a chase; but men were already on the roofs. They shouted when they saw him.

Barrent broke into a sprint. Hunters were behind him, and others were closing in from the sides. He leaped a five-foot gap between buildings, managed to hold his balance on a steeply pitched roof, and scrambled around the side.

Panic gave him speed. He was leaving the Hunters behind. If he could keep up the pace for an-

other ten minutes, he would have a substantial lead. He might be able to leave the roofs and find a better place for concealment.

Another five-foot gap between buildings came up. Barrent leaped it without hesitation.

He landed well. But his right foot went completely through rotted shingles, burying itself to the hip. He braced himself and pulled, trying to extricate his leg, but he couldn't get a purchase on the steep, crumpling roof.

"There he is!"

Barrent wrenched at the shingles with both hands. The Hunters were almost within easy gun-shot distance. By the time he got his leg out, he would be an easy target.

He had ripped a three-foot hole in the roof by the time the Hunters appeared on the next building. Barrent pulled his leg free; then, seeing no other way, he jumped into the hole.

For a second he was in the air; then he landed feet-first on a table which collapsed under him, spilling him to the floor. He got up and saw that he was in a Hadji-class living room. An old woman sat in a rocking chair less than three feet from where he had come down. Her jaw was slack with terror; she kept on rocking automatically.

Barrent heard the Hunters crossing the roof. He went

through the kitchen and out the back door, under a tangle of clotheslines and through a small hedge. Someone fired at him from a second-story window. Looking up, he saw a young boy trying to aim a heavy heat beam-er. His father had probably forbidden him to hunt in the streets.

Barrent turned into a street, and sprinted until he reached an alley. It looked familiar. He realized that he was in the Mutant's Quarter, not far from Myla's house.

He could hear the cries of the Hunters behind him. He reached Myla's house, and found the door unlocked.

They were all together—the one-eyed man, the bald old woman, and Myla. They showed no surprise at his entrance.

"So they picked you in the Lottery," the old man said. "Well, it's what we expected."

Barrent asked, "Did Myla skren it in the water?"

"There was no need to," the old man said. "It was quite predictable, considering the sort of person you are. Bold but not ruthless—that's your trouble, Barrent."

The old man had dropped the obligatory form of address for a Privileged Citizen; and that, under the circumstances, was predictable, too.

"I've seen it happen year after

year," the old man said. "You'd be surprised how many promising young men like yourself end up in this room, out of breath, holding a needlebeam as though it weighed a ton, with Hunters three minutes behind them. They expect us to help them, but mutants like to stay out of trouble."

"Shut up, Dem," the old woman said.

"I guess we have to help you," Dem said. "Myla's decided on it for reasons of her own." He grinned sardonically. "Her mother and I told her she was wrong, but she insisted. And since she's the only one of us who can skren, we must let her have her own way."

Myla said, "Even with us helping you, there's very little chance that you'll live through the Hunt."

"If I'm killed," Barrent said, "how will your prediction come true? Remember, you saw me looking at my own corpse, and it was in shiny fragments."

"I remember," Myla said. "But your death won't affect the prediction. If it doesn't happen to you in this lifetime, it will simply catch up to you in a different incarnation."

Barrent was not comforted by that. He asked, "What should I do?"

The old man handed him an armful of rags. "Put these on, and I'll go to work on your face.

You, my friend, are going to become a mutant."

In a short time, Barrent was back on the street. He was dressed in rags. Beneath them he was holding his needlebeam, and in his free hand was a begging cup. The old man had worked lavishly with a pinkish-yellow plastic. Barrent's face was now monstrously swollen at the forehead, and his nose was flat and spread out almost to the cheekbones. The shape of his face had been altered, and the livid hunt-marks were hidden.

A detachment of Hunters raced past, barely giving him a glance. Barrent began to feel more hopeful. He had gained valuable time. The last light of Omega's watery sun was disappearing below the horizon. Night would give him additional opportunities, and with any luck he could elude the Hunters until dawn. After that were the Games, of course; but Barrent wasn't planning on taking part in them. If his disguise were good enough to protect him from an entire hunting city, there was no reason why he should be captured for the Games.

Perhaps, after the holiday was over, he could appear again in Omegan society. Quite possibly there was a special reward for men who escaped both the Hunt and the Games. Such a presump-

tuous breaking of the law and getting away with it would have to be rewarded . . .

He saw another group of Hunters coming toward him. There were five in the group, and with them was Tom Rend, looking somber and proud in his new Assassin's uniform.

"Hey you!" one of the Hunters shouted. "Have you seen a Quarry pass this way?"

"No, Citizen," Barrent said, bowing his head respectfully, his needlebeam ready under his rags.

"The hell he hasn't," a man said. "These damned mutants never tell us a thing."

"Come on, we'll find him," another man said. The group moved away, but Tom Rend stayed behind.

"Are you sure you haven't seen one of the Hunted go by here?" Rend asked.

"I'm positive, Citizen," Barrent said, wondering if Rend had recognized him. He didn't want to kill him; in fact, he wasn't sure he could, for Rend's reflexes were uncannily fast. Right now, Rend's needlebeam was hanging loosely from his hand, while Barrent's was already aimed. That split-second advantage might cancel out Rend's superior speed and accuracy. But if it came to conclusions, Barrent thought, it would probably be a tie; in which case, they would more than likely kill each other.

"Well," Rend said, "if you *do* see any of the Hunted, tell them not to disguise themselves as mutants."

"Why not?"

"That trick never works for long," Rend said. "It gives a man about an hour's grace. Then the informers spot him. Now if I were being hunted, I might use mutant's disguise. But I wouldn't just sit on a curbstone with it. I'd make a break out of Tetrahyde."

"You would?"

"More certainly. A few Hunters every year escape into the mountains. The officials won't tell you that, of course, and most citizens don't know. But the Assassin's Guild keeps complete records of every trick, device and escape ever used. It's part of our business."

"That's very interesting," Barrent said. He knew that Rend had seen through his disguise. Tom was being a good neighbor—though a bad assassin.

"Of course," Rend said, "it isn't easy to get out of the city. And once you're out, that doesn't mean you're clear. There are hunter patrols to watch out for, and even worse than that—"

Rend stopped abruptly. A group of Hunters were coming toward them. Rend nodded pleasantly and walked off.

After the Hunters had passed, Barrent got up and started walk-

ing. Rend had given him good advice. Of course some men would escape from the city. Life in Omega's barren mountains would be extremely difficult; but any difficulty was better than death.

If he were able to get by the city gate, he would have to watch for the hunting patrols. And Tom had mentioned something worse. Barrent wondered what that was. Special mountain-trained hunters, perhaps? Omega's unstable climate? Deadly flora and fauna? He wished Rend had been able to finish the sentence.

By nightfall he had reached the South Gate. Bent painfully over, he hobbled toward the guard detachment that blocked his way out.

## CHAPTER 17

THERE was no trouble with the guards. Whole families of mutants were streaming out of the city, seeking the protection of the mountains until the frenzy of the Hunt was over. Barrent attached himself to one of these groups, and soon he found himself a mile past Tetrahyde, in the low foothills that curled in a semi-circle around the city.

The mutants stopped here and made their camp. Barrent went on, and by midnight he was starting up the rocky, windswept

slope of one of the higher mountains. He was hungry, but the cool, clear air was exhilarating. He began to believe that he really would live through the Hunt.

He heard a noisy group of Hunters making a sweep around the mountain. He avoided them easily in the darkness, and continued climbing. Soon there was no sound except the steady rush of wind across the cliffs. It was perhaps two in the morning; only three more hours until dawn.

In the small hours of the morning it began to rain, lightly at first, then in a cold torrent. This was predictable weather for Omega. Predictable also were the towering thunderheads that formed over the mountains, the rolling thunder, and the vivid yellow flashes of lightning. Barrent found shelter in a shallow cave, and counted himself lucky that the temperature had not plunged yet.

He sat in the cave, half-dozing, the remnants of his makeup running down his face, keeping a sleepy watch over the slope of the mountain below him. Then, in the brilliant illumination of a lightning flash, he saw something moving up the slope, heading directly toward his cave.

He stood up, the needlebeam ready, and waited for another

lightning flash. It came, and now he could see the cold, wet gleam of metal, a flashing of red and green lights, a pair of metal tentacles taking grips on the rocks and small shrubs of the mountainside.

It was a machine similar to the one Barrent had fought in the cellars of the Department of Justice. Now he knew what Rend had wanted to warn him about. And he could see why few of the Hunted escaped, even if they got beyond the city itself. This time, Max would have no randomness control to make a more equal contest out of it. And there would be no exposed fusebox under its wheels.

As Max came within range, Barrent fired. The blast bounced harmlessly off the machine's armored hide. Barrent left the shelter of his cave and began to climb.

The machine came steadily behind him, up the treacherous wet face of the mountain. Barrent tried to lose it on a plateau of jagged boulders, but Max couldn't be shaken. Barrent realized that the machine must be following a scent of some kind; probably it was keyed to follow the indelible paint on Barrent's face.

On a steep face of the mountain, Barrent rolled boulders onto the machine, hoping he could start an avalanche. Max dodged most of the flying rocks, and let

the rest bounce off him, with no visible effect.

At last Barrent was backed into a narrow, steep-sided angle of cliff. He was unable to climb any higher. He waited. When the machine loomed over him, he held the needlebeam against its metal hide and held down the trigger.

Max shuddered for a moment under the impact of the needlebeam's full charge. Then it brushed the gun away and wrapped a tentacle around Barrent's neck. The metal coils tightened. Barrent felt himself losing consciousness. He had time to wonder whether the coils would strangle him or break his neck.

Suddenly the pressure was gone. The machine had backed away a few feet. Past it, Barrent could see the first gray light of dawn.

He had lived through the Hunt. The machine was not programmed to kill him after dawn. But it wouldn't let him go. It kept him captive in the narrow angle of the cliff until Hunters came.

They congratulated Barrent on surviving the Hunt. And they wished him an easy death in the Games.

The victory he had just won was overshadowed, first by his present exhaustion and secondly by the gruelling prospect he had yet to face.

## CHAPTER 18

THE Hunters took Barrent back to Tetrahyde. He was brought past a row of dungeons under the Arena, and locked into a cell. The guards told him to be patient; the Games had already begun, and his turn would come soon.

There were nine men crammed into a cell which had been built to hold three. Most of them sat or sprawled in complete and silent apathy, already resigned to their deaths. One of them was definitely not resigned. He pushed his way to the front of the cell as Barrent entered.

"Joe!"

The little credit thief grinned at him. "A sad place to meet, Will."

"What happened to you?"

"Politics," Joe said. "It's a dangerous business on Omega, especially during the time of the Games. I thought I was safe. But . . ." He shrugged his shoulders. "I was selected for the Games this morning and here I am."

"Is there any chance of getting out of it?"

"There's a chance," Joe said. "I told your girl about you, so perhaps her organization can do something. As for me, I'm expecting a reprieve."

"Is that possible?" Barrent asked.

"Anything is possible. It's better not to hope for it, though."

"What are the Games like?" Barrent asked.

"They're the sort of thing you'd expect," Joe said. "Man-to-man combats, battles against various types of Omegan flora and fauna, needlebeam and heat-gun duels. That sort of thing. It's all copied from an old Earth festival, I'm told."

"And if anyone survives," Barrent said, "they're beyond the law."

"That's right."

"But what does it mean to be beyond the law?"

"I don't know," Joe said. "Nobody seems to know much about that. All I could find out is, the survivors of the Games are taken by The Black One. It's not supposed to be pleasant."

"I can understand that. Very little on Omega is pleasant."

"It isn't a bad place," Joe said. "You just haven't the proper spirit of—"

He was interrupted by the arrival of a detachment of guards. It was time for the occupants of Barrent's cell to enter the Arena.

"No reprieve," Barrent said.

"Well, that's how it goes," Joe said.

They were marched out under heavy guard and lined up at the iron door that separated the cell block from the main Arena. Just

before the captain of the guards opened the door, a fat, well-dressed man came hurrying down a side corridor waving a paper.

"What's this?" the captain of the guards asked.

"A writ of recognizance," the fat man said, handing his paper to the captain. "On the other side, you'll find a cease-and-desist order." He pulled more papers out of his pockets. "And here is a bankruptcy-transferral notice, a chattel mortgage, a writ of habeas corpus, and a salary attachment."

The captain pushed back his helmet and scratched his narrow forehead. "I can never understand what you lawyers are talking about. What does it mean?"

"It releases him," the fat man said, pointing to Joe.

The captain took the papers, gave them a single puzzled glance, and handed them to an aide. "All right," he said, "take him with you. But it wasn't like this in the old days. *Nothing* stopped the orderly progression of the Games."

Grinning triumphantly, Joe stepped through the ranks of guards and joined the fat lawyer. He asked him, "Do you have any papers for Will Barrent?"

"None," the lawyer said. "His case is in different hands. I'm afraid it might not be completely processed until after the Games are over."

"But I'll probably be dead then," Barrent said.

"That, I can assure you, won't stop the papers from being properly served," the fat lawyer said proudly. "Dead or alive, you will retain all your rights."

"My rights won't do me much good if I'm dead," Barrent said.

"You can't expect everything," the lawyer told him. "It's quite an accomplishment on Omega just to *have* rights."

The captain of the guards said, "All right, let's get this show on the road."

"Good luck," Joe called out. And then the line of prisoners had passed through the iron door into the glaring light of the Arena.

Barrent lived through the hand-to-hand duels in which a quarter of the prisoners were killed. After that, men armed with swords were matched against the deadlier Omegan fauna. The beasts they fought included the hintolyte and the hintosced, big-jawed, heavily armored monsters whose natural habitat was the desert region far to the south of Tetrahyde. Fifteen men later, these beasts were dead. Barrent was matched with a Saunus, a flying black reptile from the western mountains. For a while he was hard-pressed by this ugly, poison-toothed creature. But in time he figured

out a solution. He stopped trying to jab the Saunus's leathery hide and concentrated on severing its broad fan of tailfeathers. When he had accomplished that, the Saunus's flying balance was thrown badly off. The reptile crashed into the high wall that separated the combatants from the spectators. After that, it was easy enough to administer the final stroke through the Saunus's single huge eye.

This victory gave Barrent a welcome breathing spell. He moved back to the reserve pen and watched other men struggle against the trichomotreds, incredibly fast little creatures the size of rats, with the dispositions of rabid wolverines. It took five teams of prisoners to kill the trichomotreds. After a brief interlude of hand-to-hand duelling, the Arena was cleared again.

Now the hard-shelled criatin amphibians were brought in. Although sluggish in disposition, the criatins were completely protected beneath several inches of shell. Their narrow whiplash tails, which also served them as antennae, were invariably fatal to any man who approached them. Barrent had to fight one of these after it had dispatched four of his fellow prisoners.

He had watched the earlier combats carefully, and had detected the one place where the criatin antennae could not reach.

Barrent waited for his chance and jumped for that place, which was the center of the criatin's broad back.

When the shell split into a gigantic mouth—for this was the criatin method of feeding—Barrent jammed his sword into the opening. The criatin expired with gratifying promptness.

The victory left Barrent standing alone on the bloodstained sand. The rest of the prisoners were either dead or too badly maimed to fight. Barrent waited, wondering what beast the Games Committee had chosen next.

A single tendril shot up through the sand, and then another. Within seconds, a short, thick tree was growing in the Arena, sending out more roots and tendrils, and pulling all flesh, living or dead, into five small feeding-mouths which circled the base of the trunk. This was the carrion tree, indigenous to the northeastern swamps and imported at great expense. It was said to be highly vulnerable to fire; but Barrent had no fire available.

Using his sword two-handed, Barrent lopped off vines; others grew in their place. He worked with frantic speed to keep the vines from surrounding him. His arms were becoming very tired, and the tree regenerated faster than he could cut it down. There seemed no way of destroying it.

His only hope lay in the tree's slow movements. These were fast enough, but nothing compared with human musculature. Barrent ducked out of a corner in which the creeping vines were trapping him. Another sword was lying twenty yards away, half-buried in the sand. Barrent reached it, and felt a vine close around his ankles.

He hacked at it, and other vines coiled around his waist. He dug his heels into the sand and clashed the swords together, trying to produce a spark.

On his first try, the sword in his right hand broke in half.

Barrent picked up the halves and kept on trying as the vines dragged him closer to the feeding mouths. A shower of sparks flew from the clanging steel. One of them touched a vine.

With incredible suddenness the vine burst into flame. The flame spurted down the length of the vine to the main tree system. The five mouths moaned as the fire leaped toward them.

If matters had been left like that, Barrent would have been burned to death, for the Arena was nearly filled with the highly combustible vines. But the flames were endangering the wooden walls of the Arena. The Tetrahyde guard detachment put the fire out in time to save both Barrent and the spectators.

Swaying with exhaustion, Barrent stood in the center of the Arena, wondering what would be used against him next. But nothing happened. After a moment, a signal was made from the President's box, and the crowd roared in applause.

The Games were over. Barrent had lived through them.

Still nobody left their seats. The audience was waiting to see the final disposition of Barrent, who had passed beyond the law.

He heard a low, reverent gasp from the crowd. Turning quickly, Barrent saw a fiery dot of light appear in mid-air. It swelled, threw out streamers of light, and gathered them in again. It grew rapidly, too brilliant to look upon. The dot became a red and yellow globe about twenty feet in diameter, its lowest curve not quite touching the ground. It grew again. The center of the globe became thinner; a waist appeared, and above the waist the globe turned an impenetrable black. It was two globes now, one brilliant, one dark, joined by a narrow waist. As Barrent watched, the dark globe lengthened and changed into the unforgettable horn-headed shape of The Dark One.

Barrent tried to run, but the huge, black-headed figure swept forward and engulfed him. He was trapped in a blinding swirl of radiance, with darkness above

it. The light bored into his head, and he tried to scream. Then he passed out.

## CHAPTER 19

BARRENT recovered consciousness in a dim, high-ceilinged room. He was lying on a bed. Two people were standing near by. They seemed to be arguing.

"There simply isn't any more time to wait," a man was saying. "You fail to appreciate the urgency of the situation."

"The doctor said he needs at least another three days of rest." It was a woman's voice. After a moment, Barrent realized that Moera was speaking.

"He can have three days."

"And he needs time for indoctrination."

"You told me he was bright. The indoctrination shouldn't take long."

"It might take weeks."

"Impossible. The ship lands in six days."

"Eylan," Moera said, "you're trying to move too fast. We can't do it this time. On the next Landing Day we will be much better prepared—"

"The situation will be out of hand by then," the man said. "I'm sorry, Moera, we have to use Barrent immediately, or not use him at all."

Barrent said, "Use me for

what? Where am I? Who are you?"

The man turned to the bed. In the faint light, Barrent saw a very tall, thin, stooped old man with a wispy moustache.

"I'm glad you're awake," he said. "My name is Swen Eylan. I'm in command of Group Two."

"What's Group Two?" Barrent asked. "How did you get me out of the Arena? Are you agents of The Black One?"

Eylan grinned. "Not exactly agents. We'll explain everything to you shortly. First, I think you'd better have something to eat and drink."

A nurse brought in a tray. While Barrent ate, Eylan pulled up a chair and told Barrent about The Black One.

"Our Group," Eylan said, "can't claim to have started the religion of Evil. That appears to have sprung up spontaneously on Omega. But since it was there, we have made occasional use of it. The priests have been remarkably cooperative. After all, the worshippers of Evil set a high positive value upon corruption. Therefore, in the eyes of an Omegan priest, the appearance of a fraudulent Black One is not anathema. Quite the contrary, for in the orthodox worship of Evil, a great deal of emphasis is put upon false images—especially if they are big, fiery, impres-

sive images like the one which rescued you from the Arena."

"How did you produce that?" Barrent asked.

"It has to do with friction surfaces and planes of force," Eylan said. "You'd have to ask our engineers for more details."

"Why did you rescue me?" Barrent asked.

Eylan glanced at Moera, who shrugged her shoulders. Looking uncomfortable, Eylan said, "We would like to use you for an important job. But before I tell you about it, I think you should know something about our organization. Certainly you must have some curiosity about us."

"A great deal," Barrent said. "Are you some kind of criminal elite?"

"We're an elite," Eylan said, "but we don't consider ourselves criminals. Two entirely different types of people have been sent to Omega. There are the true criminals guilty of murder, arson, armed robbery, and the like. Those are the people you lived among. And there are the people guilty of deviational crimes such as political unreliability, scientific unorthodoxy, and irreligious attitudes. These people compose our organization, which, for the purposes of identification, we call Group Two. As far as we can remember and reconstruct, our crimes were largely a matter of holding different opinions from

those which prevailed upon Earth. We were nonconformists. We probably constituted an unstable element, and a threat to the entrenched powers. Therefore we were deported to Omega."

"And you separated yourselves from the other deportees," Barrent said.

"Yes, necessarily. For one thing, the true criminals of Group One are not readily controllable. We couldn't lead them, nor could we allow ourselves to be led by them. But more important than that, we had a job to do that could only be performed in secrecy. We had no idea what devices the guardships employed to watch the surface of Omega. To keep our security intact, we went underground—literally. The room you're in now is about two hundred feet below the surface. We stay out of sight, except for special agents like Moera, who separate the political and social prisoners who belong in Group Two from the others."

"You didn't separate me," Barrent said.

"Of course not. You were allegedly guilty of murder, which put you in Group One. However, your behavior was not typical of Group One. You seemed like good potential material for us, so we helped you from time to time. But we had to be sure of you be-

fore taking you into the Group. Your repudiation of the murder charge was strongly in your favor. Also, we questioned Illiardi after you had located him. There seemed no reason to doubt that he performed the murder you were charged with. Even more strongly in your favor were your high survival qualities, which had their ultimate test in the Hunt and the Games. We were badly in need of a man like you in our work."

"Just what is your work?" Barrent asked. "What do you want to accomplish?"

"We want to go back to Earth," Eylan said.

"But that's impossible."

"We don't think so," Eylan said. "We've given the matter considerable study. In spite of the guardships, we think it's possible to return to Earth. We'll find out for sure in six days, when the breakout must be made."

Moera said, "It would be better to wait another six months."

"Impossible. A six months' delay would be ruinous. Every society has a purpose, and the criminal population of Omega is bent upon its own self-destruction. Barrent, you look surprised. Couldn't you see that?"

"I never thought about it," Barrent said. "After all, I was part of it."

"It's self evident," Eylan said. "Consider the institutions—all centered around legalized murder. The holidays are excuses for mass murders. Even the law, which governs the rate of murder, is beginning to break down. The population lives near the edge of a pandemic. And rightfully so. There's no longer any security. The only way to live is to kill. The only way to rise in status is to kill. The only safe thing is to kill—more and more, faster and faster."

"You exaggerate," Moera said in his own defense.

"I don't think so. I realize that there seems to be a certain permanence to Omegan institutions, a certain inherent conservatism even to murder. But it's an illusion. I have no doubt that all dying societies projected their illusion of permanence—right up to the end. Well, the end of Omegan society is rapidly approaching."

"How soon?" Barrent asked.

"An explosion point will be reached in about four months," Eylan said. "The only way to change that would be to give the population a new direction, a different cause."

"Earth," Barrent said.

"Exactly. That's why the attempt must be made immediately."

"Well, I don't know much about it," Barrent said. "But I'll

go along with you. I'll gladly be a part of any expedition."

Eylan looked uncomfortable again. "I suppose I haven't made myself clear," he said. "You are going to be the expedition, Barrent. You and only you. Forgive me, have I startled you?"

"Yes," Barrent said. "Let me think about that for a moment. I should be used to surprises."

## CHAPTER 20

ACCORDING to Eylan, Group Two had at least one serious flaw: the men who composed it were, for the most part, past their physical prime. There were some younger members, of course; but they had had little contact with violence, and little chance to develop traits of self-sufficiency. Secure in the underground, most of them had never fired a beamer in anger, had never been forced to run for their lives, had never encountered the make-or-break situations through which Barrent had lived. They were brave but unproven. They would willingly undertake the expedition to Earth; but they would have little chance of success.

"And you think I would have a chance?" Barrent asked.

"I think so. You're young and strong, reasonably intelligent, and extremely resourceful. You have a high survival drive. If

any man could succeed, I believe you could."

"Why send just one man?"

"Because there's no sense in sending a group. The chance of detection would simply be increased. By using one man, we get maximum security and opportunity. If you succeed, we will receive valuable information about the nature of the enemy. If you don't succeed, if you are captured, your attempt will be considered the action of an individual rather than a group. We will still be free to start a general uprising from Omega."

"How am I supposed to get back to Earth?" Barrent asked. "Do you have a spaceship hidden away somewhere?"

"I'm afraid not. We plan to transport you to Earth aboard the next prison ship."

"That's impossible."

"Not at all. We've studied the landings. They follow an invariant pattern. The prisoners are marched out, accompanied by the guards. While they're assembled in the square, the ship itself is undefended, although loosely surrounded by a cordon of guards. To get you aboard, we will start a disturbance. It should take the guards' attention long enough for you to get on the ship."

"Even if I get aboard, I'll be captured as soon as the guards return."

"You shouldn't be," Eylan said. "The prison ship is an immense structure with many hiding places for a stowaway. And the element of surprise will be in your favor. It's the first time in the history of Omega that something like this has been attempted."

"I'll be captured when the ship reaches Earth."

"Not if you disguise yourself as a member of the ship's personnel," Eylan said. "Remember, the inevitable inefficiency of a huge bureaucracy will be working for you."

"I hope so," Barrent said. "Let's suppose I reach Earth safely and get the information you want. How do I send it back?"

"You send it back on the next prison ship," Eylan said. "We plan to capture that one."

Barrent rubbed his forehead wearily. "What makes you think that any of this—my expedition or your uprising—can succeed against an organization as powerful as Earth?"

"We have to take the chance," Eylan said. "Take it or go down in a bloody shambles with the rest of Omega. I agree that the odds are weighted against us. But our choice is either to make the attempt or to die without making any attempt at all."

Moera nodded at this. "Also, the situation has other possibili-

ties. The government of Earth is obviously repressive. That argues the existence of underground resistance groups on Earth itself. You may be able to contact those groups. A revolt both here *and* on Earth would give the government something to think about."

"Maybe," Barrent said.

"We have to hope for the best," Eylan said. "Are you with us?"

"Certainly," Barrent said. "I'd rather die on Earth than on Omega."

The prison ship lands in six days," Eylan said. "During that time, we will give you the information we have about Earth. Part of it is memory reconstruction, part has been skrenned by the mutants, and the rest is logical constructs. It's all we have, and I think it gives a reasonably accurate picture of current conditions on Earth."

"How soon do we start?" Barrent asked.

"Right now," Eylan said.

First, Barrent received a general briefing on the physical makeup of Earth, its climate and major population centers. Then he was sent to Colonel John Bray, formerly of the Earth Deep Space Establishment. Bray talked to him about the probable military strength of Earth as represented by the number of

spaceships around Omega and their apparent level of scientific development. He gave estimates of the size of the Earth forces, their probable divisions into land, sea and space groups, their assumed level of efficiency. An aide, Captain Carell, lectured on special weapons, their probable types and ranges, their availability to the general Earth population. Another aide, Lieutenant Daoud, talked about detection devices, their probable locations, and how to avoid them.

Then Barrent was turned back to Eylan for political indoctrination. From him, Barrent learned that Earth was believed to be a dictatorship. He learned the methods of a dictatorship, its peculiar strengths and weaknesses, the role of the secret police, the use of terror, the problem of informers. There was a great deal to remember.

When Eylan was finished with him, Barrent went to a small, beady-eyed man named Raint, who lectured on Earth's memory-destroying system. Using the premise that memory was destroyed to render opposition ineffective, Raint went on to construct the probable nature of an underground movement on Earth under those circumstances, and how Barrent might contact them, and what the underground's capabilities might be.

Finally he was given the full

details of Group Two's plan for him to board the ship.

When Landing Day came, Barrent felt a definite sense of relief. He was heartily sick of day and night cramming. Any sort of action was better than that.

## CHAPTER 21

BARRENT watched the huge prison ship maneuver into position and sink noiselessly to the ground. It gleamed dully in the afternoon sun, tangible proof of Earth's long reach and powerful grasp. A hatch opened, and a landing stage was let down. The prisoners, flanked by their guards, marched down this stage and assembled in the square.

As usual, most of the population of Tetrahyde had gathered to watch and cheer the disembarkation ceremony. Barrent moved through the crowd and stationed himself behind the ranks of prisoner's and guards. He touched his pocket to make sure the gun was still there. It had been made for him by Group Two fabricators, completely of plastic to escape any metals detector. The rest of his pockets were stuffed with equipment. He hoped he wouldn't have to use any of it.

The loudspeaker voice began to read off the prisoners' numbers, as it had when Barrent had disembarked. He listened,

knees slightly bent, waiting for the beginning of the diversion planned by Group Two.

The loudspeaker voice was coming to the end of the prisoner list. There were only ten left. Barrent edged forward. The voice droned on. Four prisoners left, three . . .

As the number of the last prisoner was announced, the diversion began. A black cloud of smoke darkened the pale sky, and Barrent knew that the Group had set fire to the empty barracks in Square A-2. He waited.

Then it came. There was a stupendous explosion, blasting through two rows of empty buildings. The shock wave was staggering. Even before debris began to fall, Barrent was running toward the spaceship.

The second and third explosions went off as he came into the ship's shadow. Quickly he stripped off his Omegan outer garments. Under them, he wore a facsimile of guard's uniform. Now he ran toward the landing stage.

The loudspeaker voice was calling loudly for order. The guards were still bewildered.

The fourth explosion threw Barrent to the ground. He got to his feet instantly and sprinted up the landing stage. He was inside the ship. Outside, he could hear the guard captain

shouting orders. The guards were beginning to form into ranks, their weapons ready to use against the restive crowd. They were retreating to the ship in good order.

Barrent had no more time to listen. He was standing in a long, narrow corridor. He turned to the right and raced toward the bow of the ship. Far behind him, he could hear the heavy marching tread of the guards.

Now, he thought, the information he had been given about the ship had better be right, or the expedition was finished before it began.

He sprinted past rows of empty cells, and came to a door marked *Guard Assembly Room*. A lighted green bulb above the door showed that the air system was on. He went by it, and came to another door. An enterprising member of Group Two had opened that door just before his disembarkation. Barrent tried it now, and found it unlocked. Within was a room stacked high with spare engine parts. He entered and closed the door.

The guards marched down the corridor. Barrent could hear them talking as they entered the assembly room.

"What do you think started those explosions?"

"Who knows? Those prisoners are crazy, anyhow."

"They'd blow up the whole planet, if they could."

"Good riddance."

"Yeah. Well, it didn't cause any damage. There was an explosion like that about fifteen years ago. Remember?"

"I wasn't here then."

"Well, it was worse than this. Two guards were killed, and maybe a hundred prisoners."

"What started it?"

"Don't know. These Omegans just enjoy blowing things up."

"Next thing you know, they'll be trying to blow us up."

"Not a chance. Not with the guardships up there."

"You think so? Well, I'll be damned glad to get back to the checkpoint."

"You said it. Be good to get off this ship and live a little."

"It isn't a bad life at the checkpoint, but I'd rather go back to Earth."

"Well, you can't have everything."

The last of the guards entered the assembly room and dogged the door shut. Barrent waited. After a while, he felt the ship vibrate. It was beginning its takeoff.

He had already learned some valuable information. Apparently all or most of the guards got off at the checkpoint. Did that mean that another detachment of guards got on? Probably. And a checkpoint implied that the

ship was searched for escaped prisoners. It was probably only a perfunctory search, since no prisoner had escaped in the history of Omega. Still, he would have to figure out a way of avoiding it.

But he would face that when the time came. Now he felt the vibration stop, and he knew that the ship had left the surface of Omega. He was aboard, unobserved, and the ship was on its way to Earth. So far, everything had gone according to plan.

For the next few hours, Barrent stayed in the storage room. He was feeling very tired, and his joints had begun to ache. The air in the small room had a sour, exhausted smell. Forcing himself to his feet, Barrent walked to the air vent and put his hand over it. No air was coming through. He took a small gauge out of his pocket. The oxygen content of the room was falling rapidly.

Cautiously, he opened the storeroom door and peered out. Although he was dressed in a perfect replica of guard's uniform, he knew he couldn't pass among those men who knew each other so well. He had to stay in hiding. And he had to have air.

The corridors were deserted. He passed the guard assembly room and heard faint murmurs of conversation inside. The

green light glowed brightly over the door. Barrent walked on, beginning to feel the first signs of dizziness. His gauge showed him that the oxygen content in the corridor was starting to fall quite rapidly.

The Group had assumed that the air system would be used throughout the ship. Now Barrent could see how illogical that was. With only guards and crew aboard, there was no need to supply air for the entire huge ship. There would be air in the little man-inhabited islands of the guard room and the crew's section, and nowhere else.

Barrent hurried down the dim, silent corridors, gasping for breath. The air was rapidly growing bad. Perhaps it was being used in the assembly room before the ship's main air supply was touched.

He passed unlocked doors, but the green bulbs above them were unlighted. He had a pounding headache, and his legs felt as though they were turning to jelly. He tried to figure out a course of action.

The crew's section seemed to offer him the best chance. Ship's personnel might not be armed. Even if they were, they would be less ready for trouble than the guards. Perhaps he could hold one of the officers at gunpoint, perhaps he could take over the ship.

It was worth trying. It had to be tried.

At the end of the corridor he came to a staircase. He climbed past a dozen deserted levels, and came at last to a stencilled sign on one of the walls. It read *Officer's Country*, and an arrow pointed the way.

Barrent took the plastic needlebeam out of his pocket and staggered down the corridor. He was beginning to lose consciousness. Black shadows formed and dissipated on the edges of his vision. He was experiencing vague hallucinations, flashes of horror in which he felt the corridor walls falling in on him. He found that he was on his hands and knees, crawling toward a door marked *Control Room. No Admittance except to Ship's Officers*.

The corridor seemed to be filled with gray fog. It cleared momentarily, and Barrent realized that his eyes were not focusing properly. He pulled himself to his feet and turned the door handle. It began to open. He took a firm grip on the needle-beam and tried to prepare himself for action.

But, as the door opened, darkness closed irrevocably around the edges of his vision. He thought he could see startled faces, hear a voice shouting, "Watch out! He's got a gun!" And then the blackness closed

completely around him, and he fell endlessly forward into the control room.

## CHAPTER 22

BARRENT'S return to consciousness was sudden and complete. He sat up and saw that he had fallen inside the control room. The metal door was closed behind him, and he was breathing without difficulty. He could see no sign of the crew. They must have gone after the guards, assuming he would stay unconscious.

He scrambled to his feet, instinctively picking up his needlebeam. He examined the weapon closely, then frowned and put it away. Why, he wondered, would the crew leave him alone in the control room, the most important part of the spaceship? Why would they leave him armed?

He tried to remember the faces he had seen just before he collapsed. They were indistinct memories, vague and unfocused figures with hallow, dreamlike voices. Had there really been people in here?

The more he thought about it, the more certain he was that he had conjured those people out of his fading consciousness. There had been no one here. He was alone in the ship's nerve center.

He approached the main control board. It was divided into

ten stations. Each section had its rows of dials, whose slender indicators pointed to incomprehensible readings. Each had its switches, wheels, rheostats, and levers.

Barrent walked slowly past the stations, watching the patterns of flashing lights that ran to the ceiling and rippled along the walls. The last station seemed to be some kind of over-all control for the rest. A small screen was marked: *Coordination, Manual/Automatic*. The *Automatic* part was lighted. There were similar screens for navigation, lookout, collision control, sub-space entry and exit, normal space entry and exit, and landing. All were on automatic. Further on he found the programming screen, which clicked off the progress of the flight in hours, minutes, and seconds. Time to checkpoint one was now 29 hours, 4 minutes, 51 seconds. Stopover time was three hours. Time from the checkpoint to Earth was 480 hours.

The control board flashed and hummed to itself, serene and self-sufficient. Barrent couldn't help feeling that the presence of a human in this temple of the machine was sacrilege.

He checked the air ducts. They were set for automatic feed, giving just enough air to support the room's present human population of one.

But where was the crew? Bar-

rent could understand the necessity of operating a spaceship largely on an automatic programming system. A structure as huge and complex as this had to be self-sufficient. But men had built it, and men had punched out the programs. Why weren't men present to monitor the switchboards, to modify the program when necessary? Suppose the guards had needed more time on Omega? Suppose it became necessary to bypass the checkpoint and return directly to Earth? Suppose it was imperative to visit some other planet? Who re-set the programs, who gave the spaceship its orders, who was the guiding intelligence that directed the entire operation? A machine couldn't think, it could only follow orders. Where were the men who *could* think, and guide the ship accordingly? Where were the captain and the crew?

Barrent looked around the control room. He found a storage bin filled with oxygen respirators. He put one on, tested it, and went into the corridor.

After a long walk, he reached a door marked *Crew's Quarters*. Inside, the room was neat and bare. The beds stood in neat rows, without sheets or blankets. There were no clothes in the closets, no personal possessions of any kind. Barrent left and in-

spected the officers' and captain's quarters. He found no sign of recent human habitation.

He returned to the control room. It was apparent now that the ship had no crew. Perhaps the authorities on Earth felt so certain of their schedules and the reliability of their ship that they had decided a crew was superfluous. Perhaps . . .

But it seemed to Barrent a reckless way of doing things. There was something very strange about an Earth that allowed spaceships to run without human supervision.

He decided to suspend further judgment until he had acquired more facts. For the time being, he had to think about the problems of his own survival. There was concentrated food in his pockets, but he hadn't been able to carry much water. Would the crewless ship have supplies? He had to remember the detachment of guards, down below in their assembly room. And he had to think about what was going to happen at the checkpoint, and what he would do about it at that time.

Barrent found that he did not have to use his own food supplies. In the officers' mess, machines still dispensed food and drink at the push of a button. Barrent didn't know if these were natural or chemically reconstituted foods. They tasted

fine and seemed to nourish him, so he really didn't care.

He explored part of the ship's upper levels. After becoming lost several times, he decided not to take any more unnecessary risks. The life-center of the ship was its control room, and Barrent spent most of his time there.

He found a viewport. Activating the switch that opened the shutters, Barrent was able to look out on the vast spectacle of stars glowing in the blackness of space. Stars without end stretched past the furthest limits of his imagination. Looking at this, Barrent felt a vast surge of pride. This was where he belonged, and those unknown stars were his heritage.

The time to the checkpoint dwindled to six hours. Barrent watched new portions of the control board come to life, checking and altering the forces governing the ship, preparing for a landing. Three and a half hours before landing, Barrent made an interesting discovery. He found the central communication system for the entire ship. By turning on the receiving end, he could overhear the conversations in the guards' room.

He didn't learn much that was useful to him. Either through caution or lack of concern, the guards didn't discuss politics. Their lives were spent on the

checkpoint, except for occasional brief leaves to Earth. Some of the things they said Barrent found incomprehensible. But he continued to listen, fascinated by anything these men of Earth had to say.

"Swimming pools are pretty good."

"Me, I'd rather swim in a lake."

"You ever go swimming in Florida? The ocean is so warm . . ."

"I don't like salt water."

"The year before I was drafted into the Guards, I won third prize at the Dayton Orchid Fair."

"I'm buying a little retirement house in Antarctica."

"How much longer you got to serve, kid?"

"Eighteen years."

"Well, someone's got to do it."

"Sure. But why me?"

"Checkpoint's not so bad. It's a pretty little place."

"Everything's artificial on it, though. The air, flowers, and food . . ."

"Well, you can't have everything. You got your family there."

"They want to get back to Earth."

"After five years on the checkpoint, you can't take Earth. The gravity gets you."

"I'll get used to gravity."

"Your legs'll varicose."

"So I'll get new legs."

"Anyone wanna play some poker?"

From these conversations, Barrent learned that the grim-faced guards were extremely human beings, just like the prisoners on Omega. Most of the guards didn't like the work they were doing. Like the Omegans, they longed for a return to Earth.

He stored the information away. The ship had reached the checkpoint, and the giant switchboard flashed and rippled, making its final adjustments for the intricate job of docking.

At last the maneuver was completed and the engines shut down to standby. Through the communications system, Barrent heard the guards leave their assembly room. He followed them down the corridors to the landing stage. He heard the last of them, as he left the ship, say, "Here comes the goon squad. Whatcha say, boys?"

There was no answer. The guards were gone, and there was a new sound in the corridors; the heavy marching feet of what the guard had called the goon squad.

There seemed to be a lot of them. Their inspection began in the engine rooms, and moved methodically upward. From the sounds, they seemed to be opening every door on the ship and

searching every room and closet.

Barrent held the needlebeam in his perspiring hand and wondered where, in all the territory of the ship, he could hide. He would have to assume that they were going to look everywhere. In that case, his best chance lay in evading them and hiding in a section of the ship already searched.

He slipped on a respirator and moved into the corridor.

## CHAPTER 23

HALF an hour later, Barrent still hadn't figured out a way of getting past the goon squad. They had finished inspecting the lower levels and were moving up to the control room deck. Barrent could hear them marching down the hallways. He kept on walking, a hundred yards in front of them, trying to find some way of hiding.

There should be a staircase at the end of this passageway. He could take it down to a different level, a part of the ship which had already been searched. He hurried on, wondering if he were wrong about the location of the staircase. He still had only the haziest idea of the layout of the ship. If he were wrong, he would be trapped.

He came to the end of the corridor, and the staircase was

there. The footsteps behind him sounded closer. He started down, peering backwards over his shoulder.

And ran headfirst into a man's huge chest.

Barrent flung himself back, bringing his plastic gun to bear on the enormous figure. But he stopped himself from firing. The thing that stood in front of him was not human.

It stood nearly seven feet high, dressed in a black uniform with *Inspection Team—Android B212*, stencilled on its front. Its face was a stylization of a human's, cleverly sculptured out of putty-colored plastic. Its eyes glowed a deep, impossible red. It swayed on two legs, balancing carefully, looking at Barrent, moving slowly toward him. Barrent backed away, wondering if a needlebeam could stop it.

He never had a chance to find out, for the android walked past him and continued up the stairs. Stencilled on the back of his uniform were the words, *Rodent Control Division*. This particular android, Barrent realized, was programmed only to look for rats and mice. The presence of a stowaway made no impression on him. Presumably the other androids were similarly specialized.

He stayed in an empty storage room on a lower level until he heard the sounds of the androids

leaving. Then he hurried back to the control room. No guards came aboard. Exactly on schedule, the big ship left the checkpoint, traveling to Earth.

The rest of the journey was uneventful. Barrent slept and ate and watched the spectacle of the stars through the viewport. He tried to visualize the planet he was coming to, but no pictures formed in his mind. What sort of a people built huge starships but failed to equip them with a crew? Why did they send out inspection teams, then give those teams the narrowest and most specialized sort of vision? Why did they have to deport a sizeable portion of their population—and then fail to control the conditions under which the deportees lived and died? Why was it necessary for them to wipe the prisoners' minds clean of all memory of Earth?

Barrent couldn't think of any answers. He would have to wait until he arrived on Earth.

The control room clocks moved steadily on, counting off the minutes and hours of the trip. The spaceship emerged from subspace and went into deceleration orbit around a blue and green world which Barrent observed with mixed emotions. He found it hard to realize that he was returning at last to Earth, a home he hardly remembered.

THE spaceship landed at noon on a brilliant sunlit day, somewhere on Earth's North American continent. Barrent had planned on waiting for darkness before leaving; but the control room screens flashed a warning: *All passengers and crew must disembark at once. Ship rigged for full decontamination procedure. Twenty minutes.*

He didn't know what was meant by a full decontamination procedure. But since the crew was emphatically ordered to leave, a respirator might not provide much safety. Of the two dangers, leaving the ship seemed the lesser.

The members of Group Two had given a good deal of thought to the clothing Barrent would wear when he left the ship. Those first minutes on Earth might be crucial. No cunning could help him if his clothing were obviously strange, outlandish, alien. Typical Earth clothing was the answer; but the Group wasn't sure what the citizens of Earth wore. One part of the Group had wanted Barrent to dress in their reconstructed approximation of civilian dress. Another part felt that guard's uniform was safer. Barrent himself had agreed with a third opinion, which felt that a me-

chanic's one-piece coverall would be least noticeable around a spacefield, and suffer the least change of style over the years. In the towns and cities, this disguise might put him at a disadvantage; but he had to meet one problem at a time.

Dressed in coveralls, his needlebeam concealed under them, a collapsible lunch box in his hand, Barrent walked down the corridor to the landing stage. He hesitated for a moment, wondering if he should leave his gun on the ship. He decided not to part with it. An inspection would reveal him anyhow; and with the gun, he would have a chance of breaking away from the police.

He took a deep breath and marched out of the ship and down the landing stage.

There were no guards, no inspection party, no police, no army units, and no customs officials. There was no one at all. Far to one side of the wide field he could see rows of spaceships glistening in the sun. Straight ahead of him was a fence, and in it was an open gate.

Barrent walked across the field, quickly but without obvious haste. He had no idea what this meant. Perhaps the secret police of Earth had more subtle means of checking on passengers from the starships.

He reached the gate. There was no one there except a bald,

middle-aged man and a boy of perhaps ten. They seemed to be waiting for him. Barrent found it hard to believe that these were government officials; still, who knew the ways of Earth? He passed through the gate.

Barrent walked for fifty yards, his spine tingling, expecting momentarily to feel the blow of a needlebeam or a heatgun. But when he looked back, the man and the boy were turned away from him, earnestly observing the spaceship.

The road from the spaceport led past a row of storage sheds to a section of woods. Barrent walked until he was out of sight of the spaceport. Then he left the road and went into the woods. He didn't want to stretch his luck. He wanted to think things over, sleep in the woods for the night, and then in the morning go to a city or town.

He pushed his way past dense underbrush into the forest proper. Here he walked through shaded groves of giant oaks. All around him was the chirp and bustle of unseen bird and animal life. Far in front of him was a large white sign nailed to a tree. Barrent reached it, and read: *Forestdale National Park. Picnickers and Campers Welcome.*

Barrent was a little disappointed, even though he realized there would be no virgin wilder-

ness so near a spaceport. In fact, on a planet as old and as highly developed as Earth, there was probably no virgin land at all, except what had been preserved in national forests.

The sun was low on the horizon, and there was a chill in the long shadows thrown across the forest floor. Barrent found a comfortable spot under a gigantic oak, arranged leaves for a bed, and lay down. He had a great deal to think about. Why, for example, hadn't guards been posted at Earth's most important contact point—an interstellar spaceport? Did security measures start later, at the towns and cities? Or was he already under some sort of surveillance, some infinitely subtle spy system that followed his every movement and apprehended him only when it was ready? Or was that too fanciful. Could it be that—

"Good evening," a voice said, close to his right ear.

Barrent flung himself away from the voice in a spasm of nervous reaction, his hand diving for his needlebeam.

"And a very pleasant evening it is," the voice continued, "here in Forestdale National Park. The temperature is 78.2 degrees Fahrenheit, humidity 23 percent, barometer steady at 29.9. Old campers, I'm sure, already recognize my voice. For the new na-

ture-lovers among you, let me introduce myself. I am Oaky, your friendly oak tree. I'd like to welcome all of you, old and new, to your friendly national forest."

Sitting upright in the gathering darkness, Barrent peered around, wondering what kind of a trick this was. The voice really did seem to come from the giant oak tree.

"The enjoyment of nature," said Oaky, "is now easy and convenient for everyone. You can enjoy complete seclusion and still be no more than a ten-minute walk from public transportation. For those who do not desire seclusion, we have guided tours at nominal cost through these ancient glades. Remember to tell your friends about your friendly national park. The full facilities of this park are waiting for all lovers of the great outdoors."

A panel in the tree opened. Out slid a bedroll, a thermos bottle, and a box supper.

"I wish you a pleasant evening," said Oaky, "amid the wild splendor of nature's wonderland. And now the National Symphony Orchestra under the direction of Otter Krug brings you "The Upland Glades," by Ernesto Nestrichala, recorded by the National North American Broadcasting Company. This is your friendly oak tree signing off."

Music emanated from several

hidden speakers. Barrent scratched his head; then, deciding to take matters as they came, he ate lunch, drank coffee from the thermos, unrolled the bedroll and lay down.

Sleepily he contemplated the notion of a forest wired for sound, equipped with food and drink, and containing no point more than ten minutes from public transportation. Earth certainly did a lot for her citizens. Presumably they liked this sort of thing.

He tossed and turned for a while, trying to get used to the music. After a while it blended into the background of wind-blown leaves and creaking branches. Barrent went to sleep.

## CHAPTER 25

IN THE morning, the friendly oak tree dispensed breakfast and shaving equipment. Barrent ate, washed and shaved, and set out for the nearest town. He had his objectives firmly in mind. He had to establish some sort of foolproof disguise, and he had to make contact with the Earth underground. When this was accomplished, he had to find out as much as he could about Earth's secret police, military dispositions, space fleet, and the like.

Group Two had worked out a procedure for accomplishing these objectives. As Barrent

came to the outskirts of a town, he hoped that the Group's methods would work. So far, the Earth he was on had very little resemblance to the Earth which the Group had reconstructed.

He walked down interminable streets lined with small white cottages. At first, he thought every house looked the same. Then he realized that each had one or two small architectural differences. But instead of making the houses more individual, these niggling differences produced an even more monotonously similar effect. There were hundreds of these cottages, stretching as far as he could see, each of them set upon a little plot of carefully tended grass. Their genteel sameness depressed him. Unexpectedly he missed the ridiculous, clumsy, makeshift individuality of Omegan buildings.

He reached a shopping center. The stores repeated the pattern set by the houses. They were low, discreet, and very similar. Only a close inspection of their window displays revealed differences between a food store and a sports shop. He passed a small building with a sign that read, *Robot Confessional. Open 24 hours a day.* It seemed to be some sort of church.

The procedure set by Group Two for locating the underground on Earth was simple and

straightforward. Revolutionaries, he had been told, are found in greatest quantity among a civilization's most depressed elements. Poverty breeds dissatisfaction; the have-nots want to take from those who have. Therefore, the logical place to look for subversion is in the slums.

It was a good theory. The trouble was, Barrent couldn't find any slums. He walked for hours, past neat stores and pleasant little homes, playgrounds and parks, scrupulously tended farms, and then past more houses and stores. Nothing looked much better or worse than anything else.

By evening, he was tired and footsore. As far as he could tell, he had discovered nothing of significance. Before he could penetrate any deeper into the complexities of Earth, he would have to question the local citizens. It was a dangerous step, but one which he could not avoid.

He stood near a clothing store in the gathering dusk and decided upon a course of action. He would pose as a foreigner, a man newly arrived in North America from Asia or Europe. In that way, he should be able to ask questions with a measure of safety.

A man was walking toward him, a plump, ordinary-looking

fellow in a brown business suit. Barrent stopped him. "I beg your pardon," he said. "I'm a stranger here, just arrived from Rome."

"Really?" the man said.

"Yes. I'm afraid I don't understand things over here very well," Barrent said, with an apologetic little laugh. "I can't seem to find any cheap hotels. If you could direct me—"

"Mister, what are you trying to pull?" the man asked, his face hardening.

"Nothing at all! As I said, I'm a foreigner, and I'm just looking—"

"Now look," the man said, "you know as well as I do that there aren't any foreigners any more."

"There aren't?"

"Of course not. I've *been* in Rome. It's just like here in Wilmington. Same sort of houses and stores. Nobody's a foreigner any more."

Barrent couldn't think of anything to say. He smiled nervously.

"Furthermore," the man said, "there are no cheap hotels anywhere on Earth. Why should there be? Who would stay in them?"

"Who indeed?" Barrent said. "I guess I've had a little too much to drink."

"Nobody drinks anymore," the man said. "I don't understand

this. What are you trying to do? What sort of a game is this?"

"What sort of a game do you *think* it is?" Barrent asked, falling back on a technique which the Group had recommended.

The man stared at him, frowning. "I think I get it," he said. "You must be an Opinioner."

"Mmm," Barrent said, non-committally.

"Sure, that's it," the man said. "You're one of those guys goes around asking people's opinions on things. For surveys and that sort of thing Right?"

"You've made a very intelligent guess," Barrent said.

"Well, I don't guess it was too hard. Opinioners are always walking around trying to get people's attitudes on things. I would have spotted you right away if you'd been wearing regular Opinioner's clothing." The man started to frown again. "How come you aren't dressed like an Opinioner?"

"I just graduated," Barrent said. "Haven't had a chance to get the clothes."

"Oh. Well, you should get the right clothes," the man said. "Also, you shouldn't sneak up on people with questions."

"I get better answers that way," Barrent said.

"Well, you don't have to sneak up on me. Go ahead, ask me. I'll answer your questions."

"This was just a test sam-

pling," Barrent said. "Thank you for your cooperation, sir. Perhaps I'll have a chance to interview you again the near future."

"Any time," the man said. He nodded politely and walked off.

Barrent thought about it, and decided that the occupation of Opinioner was perfect for him. It would give him the all-important right to ask questions, to meet people, to find out how Earth lived. He would have to be careful, of course, not to reveal his ignorance. But working with circumspection, he should have a general knowledge of this civilization in a few days.

First, he would have to buy Opinioner's clothing. That seemed to be important. The trouble was, he had no money with which to pay for it. The Group had been unable to duplicate Earth money; they couldn't even remember what it looked like.

But they had provided him with a means of overcoming even that obstacle. Barrent turned and went into the nearest clothing store.

The owner of the store was a short man with china-blue eyes and a salesman's ready smile. He welcomed Barrent and asked how he could be of service.

"I need an Opinioner's suit," Barrent told him, "I've just graduated."

"Of course, sir," the owner

said. "And you've come to the right place for it. Most of the smaller stores don't carry the clothing for anything but the more common professions. But here at Jules Wonderson's, we have ready-wears for all of the five hundred and twenty major professions listed in the Civil Service Almanac. I am Jules Wonderson."

"Pleased to meet you," Barrent said. "Do you have a ready-wear in my size?"

"I'm sure I do," Wonderson said. "Would you like a Regular or a Special?"

"A Regular will do nicely."

"Most new Opinioners prefer the Special," Wonderson said. "The little extra simulated hand-made touches increase the public's respect."

"In that case I'll take the Special."

"Yes sir. Though if you could wait a day or two, we will be having it in a new fabric—a simulated Home Loom, complete with natural weaving mistakes. It looks exactly as if you or your loved ones made the suit at home. A real prestige item."

"Perhaps I'll come back for that," Barrent said. "Right now, I need a ready-wear."

"Of course sir," Wonderson said, disappointed but hiding it bravely. "If you'll wait just one little minute . . ."

After several fittings, Barrent

was wearing a black business suit with a thin edge of white piping around the lapels. To his inexperienced eye it looked almost exactly like the other suits Wonderson had on display for bankers, stock brokers, grocers, accountants, and the like. But for Wonderson, who talked about the banker's lapel and the insurance agent's drape, the differences were as clear as the gross status-symbols of Omega. Barrent decided it was just a question of training.

"There, sir!" Wonderson said. "A perfect fit, and a fabric guaranteed for a lifetime. All for thirty-nine ninety-five."

"Excellent," Barrent said. "Now, about the money—"

"Yes sir?"

Barrent took the plunge. "I don't have any."

"You don't, sir? That's quite unusual."

"Yes, it is," Barrent said. "However, I *do* have certain articles of value." From his pocket he took three diamond rings with which the Group on Omega had supplied him. "These stones are genuine diamonds, as any jeweler will be glad to attest. If you would take one of them until I have the money for payment—"

"But sir," Wonderson said, "diamonds and such have no intrinsic value. They haven't since '23, when Von Blon wrote the

definitive work destroying the concept of scarcity value."

"Of course," Barrent said, at a loss for words.

Wonderson looked at the rings. "I suppose these have a sentimental value, though."

"Certainly. We've had them in the family for generations."

"In that case," Wonderson said, "I wouldn't want to deprive you of them. Please, no arguments, sir! Sentiment is the most priceless of emotions. I couldn't sleep nights if I took even one of these family heirlooms from you."

"But there's the matter of payment."

"Pay me at your leisure."

"You mean you'll trust me, even though you don't know me?"

"Most certainly," Wonderson said. He smiled archly. "Trying out your Opinioner's methods, aren't you? Well, even a child knows that our civilization is based upon trust, not collateral. It is axiomatic that even a stranger is to be trusted until he has conclusively and unmis-takably proven otherwise."

"Haven't you ever been cheated?"

"Of course not. Crime is non-existent these days."

"In that case," Barrent said, "what about Omega?"

"I beg your pardon?"

"Omega, the prison planet. You must have heard of it."

"I think I have," Wonderson said cautiously. "Well, I should have said that crime is *almost* non-existent. I suppose there will always be a few congenital criminal types, easily recognizable as such. But I'm told they don't amount to more than ten or twelve individuals a year out of a population of nearly two billion." He smiled broadly. "My chances of meeting one are exceedingly rare."

Barrent thought about the prison ships constantly shuttling back and forth between Earth and Omega, dumping their human cargo and going back for more. He wondered where Wonderson got his statistics. He would have liked to ask, but it seemed wiser to discontinue that line of questioning.

"Thank you very much for the credit," Barrent said. "I'll be back with the payment as soon as possible."

"Of course you will," Wonderson said, warmly shaking Barrent's hand. "Take your time, sir. No rush at all."

Barrent thanked him again and left the store.

He had a profession now. And if other people believed as Wonderson did, he had unlimited credit. He was on a planet that seemed, at first glance, to be a Utopia. The Utopia presented certain contradictions, of course.

He hoped to find out more about them over the next few days.

Down the block, Barrent found a hotel called The Bide-A-Bit Home. He engaged a room for the week, on credit.

## CHAPTER 26

IN THE morning, Barrent asked directions to the nearest branch of the public library. He decided that he needed as much background out of books as he could get. With a knowledge of the history and development of Earth's civilization, he would have a better idea of what to expect and what to watch out for.

His Opinioner's clothing allowed him access to the closed shelves where the history books were kept. But the books themselves were disappointing. Most of them were Earth's ancient history, from earliest beginnings to the dawn of atomic power. Barrent skimmed through them. As he read, some memories of prior reading returned to him. He was able to jump quickly from Periclean Greece to Imperial Rome, to Charlemagne and the Dark Ages, from Norman Conquest to the Thirty Years' War, and then to a rapid survey of the Napoleonic Era. He read with more care about the World Wars. The book ended with the explosion of the first atom bombs. The other books on the shelf

were simply amplifications of various stages of history he had found in the first book.

After a great deal of searching, Barrent found a small work entitled, "The Post-War Dilemma, Volume 1," by Arthur Whittler. It began where the other histories had left off; with the atomic bombs exploding over Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Barrent sat down and began to read carefully.

He learned about the Cold War of the 1950's, when several nations were in possession of atomic and hydrogen weapons. Already, the author stated, the seeds of a massive and stultifying conformity were present in the nations of the world. In America, there was the frenzied resistance to Communism. In Russia and China, there was the frenzied resistance to Capitalism. One by one, all the nations of the world were drawn into one camp or the other. For purposes of internal security, all countries relied upon the newest propaganda and indoctrination techniques. All countries felt they needed, for survival's sake, a rigid adherence to state-approved doctrines.

The pressure upon the individuals to conform became both stronger and subtler.

The dangers of war passed. The many societies of Earth began to merge into a single

super-state. But the pressure to conform, instead of lessening, grew more intense. The need was dictated by the continued explosive increase in population, and the many problems of unification across national and ethnic lines. Differences in opinion could be deadly; too many groups now had access to the supremely deadly hydrogen bombs.

Under the circumstances, deviant behavior could not be tolerated.

Unification was finally completed. The conquest of space went on, from moon ship to planet ship to star ship. But Earth became increasingly rigid in its institutions. A civilization more inflexible than anything produced by medieval Europe punished any opposition to existing customs, habits, beliefs. These breaches of the social contract were considered major crimes as serious as murder or arson. They were punished similarly. The antique institutions of secret police, political police, informers, all were used. Every possible device was brought to bear toward the all-important goal of conformity.

For the non-conformists, there was Omega.

Capital punishment had been banished long ago; but there was neither room nor recourses to take the growing number of

criminals who crammed every prison and guardroom. The world leaders finally decided to transport these criminals to a separate prison world, copying a system which the French had used in Guiana and New Caledonia, and the British had used in Australia and America. Since it was impossible to rule this planet from Earth, the authorities didn't try. They just made sure that none of the prisoners escaped.

That was the end of volume one of Arthur Whittler's book. A note at the end said that volume two was a study of the Earth of today. It was entitled, "The Status Civilization."

The second volume was not on the shelves. Barrent asked the librarian about it. He was told that it had been destroyed in the interests of public safety.

Barrent left the library and went to a little park. He sat and stared at the ground and tried to think.

He had expected to find an Earth similar to the one described in Whittler's book. He had been prepared for a police state, tight security controls, a repressed populace, and a growing air of unrest. But that, apparently, was the past. So far, he hadn't even seen a policeman. He had observed no security controls, and the people he had met did not seem harshly repressed.

Quite the contrary. This surely seemed like a completely different world . . .

Except that year after year, the prison ships came to Omega with their cargoes of brain-washed prisoners. Who arrested them? Who judged them? Who guarded them? What sort of a society produced them?

He would have to find out the answers himself, by direct exploration of the status civilization.

## CHAPTER 27

EARLY the next morning, Barrent began his exploration. His technique was simple. He rang doorbells and asked people questions. He warned all his subjects that his real questions might be interspersed with trick or nonsense questions, whose purpose was to test the general awareness level. In that way, Barrent found he could ask anything at all about Earth, could explore controversial or even non-existent areas, and do so without revealing his own ignorance.

There was still the danger that some official would ask for his credentials, or that the police would mysteriously spring up when least expected. But he had to take those risks. Starting at the beginning of Orange Avenue, Barrent worked his way north-

ward, calling at each house as he went. His results were uneven, as a selective sampling of his work shows:

*(Mrs. A. L. Gotthreid, age 55, occupation housewife. A strong, erect, homely woman, imperious but polite, with a no-nonsense air about her.)*

"You want to ask me about class and status? Is that it?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"You Opinioners are *always* asking about class and status. One would think you would know all about it by now. But very well. Today, since everyone is equal, there is only one class. The *middle* class. The only question remaining is, to what portion of the middle class does one belong? High, low, or middle?"

"Yes ma'am. And how is that determined?"

"Why, by all sorts of little things, like the way a person speaks, eats, dresses, the way he acts in public. His manners. His clothing. You can always tell an upper 'middle class man by his clothes. It's quite unmistakable."

"I see. And the lower middle classes?"

"Well, for one thing they are marked by a lack of creative energy. A kind of dullness. They wear ready-made clothing, for example, without taking the trouble to improve it. The same goes for their homes. We all start with the same houses, but a

middle or upper middle class person makes creative changes in decor. And mere uninspired adornment won't do, let me add. That is simply the mark of the *nouveau* upper middle class. We do not receive such persons in our homes."

"Thank you, Mrs. Gotthreid. And where would you classify yourself statuswise?"

(With the very faintest hesitation). "Oh, in the upper middle, I suppose."

(*Mr. John Bruce Dreister, age 43, occupation shoe clerk. A slender, mild man, young-looking for his years.*)

"Yes sir. Myra and I have three children of school age. All boys."

"Could you give me some idea what their education consists of?"

"Sure. They learn how to read and write, and how to become good citizens. They're already starting to learn their trades. The oldest is going into the family business—shoes. The other two are taking apprenticeship courses in groceries and retail marketing. That's my wife's family's business. They also learn how to retain status, and how to utilize standard techniques for moving upward. That's about what goes on in the open classes."

"Are there other classes which are not open?"

"Well, naturally there are the closed classes. Every child attends them."

"And what do they learn in the closed classes?"

"I don't know. They're closed, like I said."

"Don't the children ever speak about those classes?"

"Nope. They talk about everything under the sun, but not about that."

"Haven't you any idea what goes on in the closed classes?"

"Sorry, I don't. At a guess—and it's only a guess, mind you—I'd say it's probably something religious. But you'd have to ask a teacher for that."

"Thank you, sir. And how do you classify yourself statuswise?"

"Middle middle class. Not much doubt about that."

(*Miss Mary Jane Morgan, age 51, occupation schoolteacher. A tall, bony, horsefaced woman.*)

"Yes sir, I think that just about sums up our curriculum at the Little Beige Schoolhouse."

"Except for the closed classes."

"I beg your pardon, sir?"

"The closed classes. You haven't discussed those."

"I'm afraid I can't."

"Why not, Miss Morgan?"

"Is that a trick question? Everyone knows that teachers aren't allowed in the closed classes."

"Who is allowed in?"

"The children, of course."

"But who teaches them?"

"The government is in charge of that."

"Of course. But who, specifically, does the teaching in the closed classes?"

"I have no idea, sir. It's none of my business. The closed classes are an ancient and respected institution. What goes on in them is quite possibly of a religious nature. But that's only a guess. Whatever it is, it's none of my business. Nor is it yours, young man, Opinioner or not."

"Thank you, Miss Morgan."

*(Colonel Edgar Nief, age 107, occupation retired. A tall, stooped old man who walked with the aid of a cane, and whose icy blue eyes were undimmed by age).*

"A little louder, please. What was that question again?"

"About the armed forces. Specifically I asked—"

"I remember now. Yes, young man, I was a colonel in the Twenty-first North American Spaceborn Commando, which was a regular unit of the Earth Defense Corps."

"And did you retire from the service?"

"No, the service retired from me."

"I beg pardon, sir?"

"You heard me correctly, young man. It happened just

sixty-three years ago. The Earth Armed Forces were demobilized, except for the police whom I cannot count. But all regular units were demobilized."

"Why was that done, sir?"

"There wasn't anyone to fight. Wasn't even anyone to guard against, or so I was told. Damned foolish business, I say."

"Why, sir?"

"Because an old soldier knows that you can never tell when an enemy might spring up. It could happen now. And then where would we be?"

"Couldn't the armies be formed again?"

"Certainly. But the present generation has no concept of serving under arms. There are no leaders left, outside of a few useless old fools like me. It would take years for an effective force, effectively led, to be formed."

"And in the meantime, Earth is completely open to invasion from the outside?"

"Yes, except for the police units. And I seriously doubt their reliability under fire."

"Could you tell me about the police?"

"There is nothing I know about them. I have never bothered my head about non-military matters."

"But it is conceivable that the police have now taken over the functions of the army, isn't it?"

that the police constitute a sizeable and disciplined para-military force?"

"It is possible, sir. Anything is possible."

(*Mr. Moerton JF Honners, age 31, occupation writer. A slim, languid man with an earnest, boyish face and smooth, corn-blond hair.*)

"You are a writer, Mr. Honners?"

"I am, sir. Though perhaps 'author' would be a better word, if you don't mind."

"Of course. Mr. Honners, are you presently engaged in writing for any of the magazines I see on the newsstands?"

"Certainly not! Those are written by incompetent hacks for the dubious delectation of the lower middle class. The stories in those magazines, in case you didn't know, are taken line by line from the works of various popular writers of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The people who do the work merely substitute adjectives and adverbs in those stories. Occasionally, I'm told, a more daring hack will substitute a verb, or even a noun. But that is rare. The editors of such magazines frown upon sweeping innovations."

"And you are not engaged in such work?"

"Absolutely not! My work is

non-commercial. I am a Creative Conrad Specialist."

"Would you mind telling me what that means, Mr. Honners?"

"I'd be happy to. My own particular field of endeavor lies in re-creating the works of Joseph Conrad, an author who lived in the pre-atomic era."

"How do you go about re-creating those works, sir?"

"Well, at present I am engaged in my fifth re-creation of *Lord Jim*. To do it, I steep myself as thoroughly as possible in the original work. Then I set about re-writing it as Conrad would have written it if he had lived today. It is a labor which calls for extreme diligence, and for the utmost in artistic integrity. A single slip could mar the re-creation. As you can see, it calls for a preliminary mastery of Conrad's vocabulary, themes, plots, characters, mood, approach, and so on. All this goes in, and yet the book cannot be a slavish *repeat*. It must have something new to say, just as Conrad would have said it. Quite a task, I must admit."

"And have you succeeded?"

"The critics have been generous, and my publisher gives me every encouragement."

"When you have finished your fifth re-creation of *Lord Jim*, what do you plan to do?"

"First I shall take a long rest. Then I shall re-create one of

Conrad's minor works. *The Planter of Malata*, perhaps."

"I see. Is re-creation the rule in all the arts?"

"It is the goal of the true aspiring artist, no matter what medium he has chosen to work in. Art is a cruel mistress, I fear."

(*Mr. Willis Ouerka, age 8, occupation student. A cheerful, black-haired, suntanned boy.*)

"I'm sorry, Mr. Opinioner, my parents aren't home right now."

"That's perfectly all right, Willis. Do you mind if I ask you a question or two?"

"I don't mind. What's that you got under your jacket, Mister? It bulges."

"I'll ask the questions, Willis, if you don't mind . . . Now do you like school?"

"It's all right."

"What courses do you take?"

"Well, there's reading and writing and status appreciation, and courses in art, music, architecture, literature, ballet and theater. The usual stuff."

"I see, That's in the open classes?"

"Sure."

"Do you also attend a closed class?"

"Sure I do. Every day."

"Do you mind talking about it?"

"I don't mind. Is that bulge a gun? I know what guns are.

Some of the big boys were passing around pictures at lunchtime a couple days ago and I peeked. Is it a gun?"

"No. My suit doesn't fit very well, that's all. Now then. Would you mind telling me what you do in the closed class?"

"I don't mind."

"What happens, then?"

"I don't remember."

"Come now, Willis."

"Really, Mr. Opinioner. We all go into this classroom, and we come out two hours later for recess. But that's all. I can't remember anything else. I've talked with the other kids. They can't remember either."

"Strange . . ."

"No sir. If we were supposed to remember, it wouldn't be closed."

"Perhaps so. Do you remember what the room looks like, or who your teacher is for the closed class?"

"No sir. I really don't remember anything at all about it."

"Thank you, Willis."

(*Mr. Richard Cuchulain Dent, age 37, occupation inventor. A plump, prematurely bald man with ironic, heavy-lidded eyes.*)

"Yep, that's right, I'm an inventor specializing in games. I brought out *Triangulate—Or Else!* last year. It's been pretty popular. Have you seen it?"

"I'm afraid not."

"Sort of a cute game. It's a simulated lost-in-space deal. The players are given incomplete data for their miniature computers, additional information as they win it. Space hazards for penalties. Lots of flashing lights and stuff like that. Very big seller."

"Do you invent anything else, Mr. Dent?"

"When I was a kid, I worked up an improved seeder-harvester. Designed to be approximately three times as efficient as the present models. And would you believe it, I really thought I had a chance of selling it."

"Did you sell it?"

"Of course not. At that time I didn't realize that the patent office was closed permanently except for the games section."

"Were you angry about that?"

"A little angry at the time. But I realized pretty fast that the models we have are plenty good enough. There's no need for more efficient or more ingenious inventions. Folks today are satisfied with what they've got. Besides, new inventions would be of no service to mankind. Earth's birth and deathrate are stable, and there's enough for everyone. To produce a new invention, you'd have to re-tool an entire factory. That would be almost impossible, since all the factories today are automatic and self-repairing. That's why there's a

moratorium on invention, except in the novelty game field."

"How do you feel about it?"

"What's there to feel? That's how things are."

"Would you like to have things different?"

"Maybe. But being an inventor, I'm classified as a potentially unstable character anyhow."

*(Mr. Barney Threnten, age 41, occupation atomics engineer specializing in spaceship design. A sallow, nervous, intelligent-looking man with sad brown eyes).*

"You want to know what I do in my job? I'm sorry you asked that, Mister, because I don't do a damned thing except walk around the damned factory. Union rules require one standby human for every robot or robotized operation. That's what I do. I just stand by."

"You sound dissatisfied, Mr. Threnten."

"I am. I wanted to be an atomics engineer. I trained for it. Then when I graduated, I found out my knowledge was fifty years out of date. Even if I learned what was going on now, I'd have no place to use it."

"Why not?"

"Because everything in atomics is automatized. I don't know if the majority of the population knows that, but it's true. From raw material to finished product,

it's all completely automatic. The only human participation in the program is quantity-control in terms of population indices. And even that is minimal."

"What happens if a part of an automatic factory breaks down?"

"It gets fixed by robot repair units."

"And if they break down?"

"The damned things are self-repairing. All I can do is stand by and watch, and fill out a report. Which is a helluva position for a man who considers himself an engineer."

"Why don't you turn to some other field?"

"No use. I've checked, and the rest of the engineers are in the same spot I'm in, watching automatic processes which they don't understand. Name your field: food processing, automobile manufacture, construction, biochem, it's all the same. Either standby engineers or no engineers at all."

"This is true for spaceflight also?"

"Sure. No member of the spacepilot's union has been off Earth for close to fifty years. They wouldn't know how to operate a ship."

"I see. All the ships are set for automatic."

"Exactly. Permanently and irrevocably automatic."

"What would happen if these

ships ran into an unprecedented situation?"

"That's hard to say. The ships can't think, you know; they simply follow pre-set programs. If the ships ran into a situation for which they were not programmed, they'd be paralyzed, at least temporarily. I think they all have an optimum-choice selector which is supposed to take over in unstructured situations; but it's never been tried out. At best, it would react sluggishly. At worst, it wouldn't work at all. And that would be fine by me."

"Do you really mean that?"

"I certainly do. I'm sick of standing around watching a machine do the same thing day after day. Most of the professional men I know feel the same way. We want to do something. Anything. Did you know that a hundred years ago human-piloted spaceships were exploring the planets of other star-systems?"

"Yes."

"Well, that's what we should be doing now. Moving outward, exploring, advancing. That's what we need."

"I agree. But don't you think you're saying rather dangerous things?"

"I know I am. But frankly, I just don't care any longer. Let them ship me to Omega if they want to. I'm doing no good here."

"Then you've heard about Omega?"

"Anyone that's connected with spaceships knows about Omega. Round trips between Omega and Earth, that's all our spaceships do. It's a helluva world. Personally, I put the blame on the clergy."

"The clergy?"

"Absolutely. Those sanctimonious fools with their endless drivel about the Church of the Spirit of Mankind Incarnate. It's enough to make a man wish for a little evil . . ."

*(Father Boeren, age 51, occupation clergyman. A stately, plum-shaped man wearing a saffron robe and white sandals.)*

"That's right, my son, I am the abbot of the local branch of the Church of the Spirit of Mankind Incarnate. Our church is the official and exclusive religious expression of the government of Earth. Our religion speaks for all the peoples of Earth. It is a composite of the best elements of all the former religions, both major and minor, skillfully blended into a single all-embracing faith."

"Abbot, aren't there bound to be contradictions in doctrine among the various religions which make up your faith?"

"There *were*. But the forgers of our present Church threw out all controversial matter. We

wanted agreement, not dissension. We preserve only certain colorful facets of those early great religions; facets with which people can identify. There have never been any schisms in our religion, because we are all-acceptant. One may believe anything one wishes, as long as it preserves the holy spirit of Mankind Incarnate. For our worship, you see, is the true worship of Man. And the spirit we recognize is the spirit of the divine and holy Good."

"Would you define Good for me, Abbot Boeren?"

"Certainly. Good is that force within us which inspires men to acts of conformity and subservience. The worship of Good is essentially the worship of oneself, and therefore the only true worship. The self which one worships is the ideal social being: the man content in his niche in society, yet ready to creatively advance his status. Good is gentle, since it is a true reflection of the loving and pitying universe. Good is continually changing in its aspects, although it comes to us in the . . . You have a strange look on your face, young man."

"I'm sorry, Abbot. I believe I heard that sermon, or one very much like it."

"It is true wherever one hears it."

"Of course. One more ques-

tion, sir. Could you tell me about the religious instruction of children?"

"That duty is performed for us by the robot-confessors."

"Yes?"

"The notion came to us from the ancient root-faith of Transcendental Freudianism. The robot-confessor instructs children and adults alike. It hears their problems within the social matrix. It is their constant friend, their social mentor, their religious instructor. Being robotic, the confessors are able to give exact and unvarying answers to any question. This aids the great work of Conformity."

"I can see that it does. What do the human priests do, Abbot?"

"They watch over the robot-confessors."

"Are these robot-confessors present in the closed classrooms?"

"I am not competent to answer that."

"They are, aren't they?"

"I truly do not know. The closed classrooms are closed to abbots as well as to other adults."

"By whose order?"

"By order of the Chief of the Secret Police."

"I see . . . Thank you, Abbot Boeren."

*(Mr. Enyen Dravivian, age 43, occupation government em-*

*ployee. A narrow-faced, beak-nosed, slit-eyed man who looked old and tired beyond his years).*

"Good afternoon, sir. You say that you are employed by the government?"

"Correct."

"Is that the state or the federal government?"

"Both."

"I see. And have you been in this employ for very long?"

"Approximately eighteen or nineteen years."

"Yes sir. Would you mind telling me what, specifically, your job is?"

"Not at all. I am the chief of the Secret Police."

"You are— I see, sir. That's very interesting. I—"

"Don't reach for the needle-beam, Mr. Barrent. I can assure you, it won't operate in the blanketed area around this house. And if you draw it, you're liable to be hurt."

"How?"

"I have my own means of protection, Mr. Barrent."

"How did you know my name?"

"I've known about you almost since you set foot upon Earth. We are not entirely without recourses, you know. But we can discuss all that inside. Won't you come in?"

"I think I'd rather not. If you don't mind."

"I'm afraid you have to."

Come, Mr. Barrent, I won't bite you."

"Am I under arrest?"

"Of course not. We're simply going to have a little talk. That's right, sir, right through there. Just make yourself comfortable."

## CHAPTER 28

DRATIVIAN led him into a large room panelled in walnut. The furniture was of a heavy, black wood, intricately carved and varnished. The desk, high and straight, seemed to be an antique. A heavy tapestry covered one entire wall. It depicted, in fading colors, a medieval hunting scene.

"Do you like it?" Dravivian asked. "My family did the furnishing. My wife copied the tapestry from an original in the Metropolitan Museum. My two sons collaborated on the furniture. They wanted something ancient and Spanish in feeling, but with more comfort than antiques usually give. A slight modification of the lines accomplished that. My own contributions are not visible. Music of the baroque period is my specialty."

"Aside from police work," Barrent said.

"Yes, aside from that." Dravivian turned away from Barrent and looked thoughtfully at the tapestry. "We will come to the matter of the police in due

course. Tell me first, what do you think of this room?"

"It's very beautiful," Barrent said.

"Yes. And?"

"Well—I'm no judge."

"You *must* judge," Dravivian said. "In this room you can see Earth's civilization in miniature. Tell me what you think of it?"

"It feels lifeless," Barrent said.

Dravivian turned to Barrent and smiled. "Yes, that's a good word for it. Self-involved might perhaps be better. This is a high-status room, Mr. Barrent. A great deal of creativity has gone into the artistic improvement of ancient archetypes. My family has re-created a bit of the Spanish past, as others have re-created bits of the Mayan, Early American, or Oceanic past. And yet, the essential hollowness is obvious. Our automatized factories produce the same goods for us year in and year out. Since everyone has these same goods, it is necessary for us to change the factory product, to improve and embroider it, to express ourselves through it, to rank ourselves by it. That's how Earth is, Mr. Barrent. Our energy and skills are channeled into essentially decadent pursuits. We re-carve old furniture, worry about rank and status, and in the meantime the frontier of the distant planets remains

unexplored and unconquered. We ceased long ago to expand. Stability brought the danger of stagnation, to which we succumbed. We became so highly socialized that individuality had to be diverted to the most harmless of pursuits, turned inward, kept from any meaningful expression. I think you have seen a fair amount of that in your time on Earth, Mr. Barrent."

"I have. But I never expected to hear the chief of the Secret Police say it."

"I'm an unusual man," Dravivian said, with a mocking smile. "And the secret police is an unusual institution."

"It must be very efficient. How did you find out about me?"

"That was really quite simple. Most of the people of Earth are security-conditioned from childhood. It's part of our heritage, you know. Nearly all the people you met were able to tell that there was something very wrong about you. You were as obviously out of place as a wolf among sheep. People noticed, and reported directly to me."

"All right," Barrent said. "Now what?"

"First I would like you to tell me about Omega."

Barrent told the police chief about his life on the prison planet. Dravivian nodded, a faint smile on his lips.

"Yes, it's very much as I expected," he said. "The same sort of thing has happened on Omega as happened in early America and Australia. There are differences, of course; you have been shut off more completely from the mother country. But the same fierce energy and drive is there, and the same ruthlessness."

"What are you going to do?" Barrent asked.

Dravivian shrugged his shoulders. "It really doesn't matter. I suppose I could kill you. But that wouldn't stop your group on Omega from sending out other spies, or from seizing one of the prison ships. As soon as the Omegans begin to move in force, they'll discover the truth anyhow."

"What truth?"

"By now it must be obvious to you," Dravivian said. "Earth hasn't fought a war for nearly two hundred years. We wouldn't know how. The organization of guardships around Omega is pure facade. The ships are completely automatized, built to meet conditions of several hundred years ago. A determined attack will capture a ship; and when you have one, the rest will fall. After that, there's nothing to stop the Omegans from coming back to Earth; and there's nothing on Earth to fight them with. This, you must realize, is

the reason why all prisoners leaving Earth are divorced from their memories. If they *remembered*, Earth's vulnerability would be painfully apparent."

"If you knew all this," Barrent asked, "why didn't you leaders do something about it?"

"That was our original intention. But there was no real drive behind the intention. We preferred not to think about it. We assumed the status quo would remain indefinitely. We didn't want to think about the day when the Omegans returned to Earth."

"What are you and your police going to do about it?" Barrent asked.

"I am a facade, too," Dravivian told him. "I have no police. The position of chief is entirely honorary. There has been no need of a police force on Earth for close to a century. We have no protective force."

"You're going to need one when the Omegans come home," Barrent said.

"Yes. There's going to be crime again, and serious trouble. But I think the final amalgamation will be successful. You on Omega have the drive, the ambition to reach the stars. I believe you need a certain stability and creativeness which Earth can provide. Whatever the results, the union is inevitable. We've lived in a dream here for too

long. It's going to take violent measures to awaken us."

Dravivian rose to his feet. "And now," he said, "since the fate of Earth and Omega seem to be decided, could I offer you some refreshment?"

## CHAPTER 29

WITH the help of the chief of police, Barrent put a message aboard the next ship to leave for Omega. The message told about conditions on Earth and urged immediate action. When that was finished, Barrent was ready for his final job—to find the judge who had sentenced him for a crime he hadn't committed, and the lying informer who had turned him in to the judge. When he found these two, Barrent knew he would regain the missing portions of his memory.

He took the night expressway to Youngerstown. By early morning he was there. Superficially, the neat rows of houses looked the same as in any other town. But for Barrent they were different, and achingly familiar. He *remembered* this town, and the monotonous houses had individuality and meaning for him. He had been born and raised in this town.

There was Mrs. Grothmeir's store, and across the street was the home of Mr. Havening, the

local interior decorating champion. Here was Billy Havelock's house. Billy had been his best friend. They had planned on being spacepilots together, and had remained good friends after school—until Barrent had been sentenced to Omega.

Here was Andrew Therkaler's house. And down the block was the school he had attended. He could remember the classes now, the lessons in status appreciation and applied creativity. He could remember how, every day, they had gone through the door that led to the closed class. But he still could not remember what he had learned there. It was a complete blank.

Right here, near two huge elms, the murder had taken place. Barrent walked to the spot and remembered how it had happened. He had been on his way home. From somewhere down the street he had heard a scream. He had turned, and a man—Illiard—had run down the street and thrown something at him. Barrent had caught it instinctively, and found himself holding an illegal handgun. A few steps further, he had looked into the twisted dead face of Andrew Therkaler.

And what had happened next? Confusion. Panic. A sensation of someone watching as he stood, gun in hand, over the corpse. There, at the end of the street,

was the refuge to which he had gone.

He walked up to it, and recognized it as a robot-confessional booth.

Barrent entered the booth. It was small, and there was a faint odor of incense in the air. The room contained a single chair. Facing it was a complex, brilliantly lighted panel.

"Good morning, Will," the panel said to him.

Barrent had a sudden sense of helplessness when he heard that soft mechanical voice. He remembered it now. That passionless voice knew all, understood all and forgave nothing. That artfully manufactured voice had spoken to him, had listened, and then had judged. In his dream, he had personified the robot-confessor into the figure of a human judge.

"You remember me?" Barrent asked.

"Of course," said the robot-confessor. "You were one of my parishoners before you went to Omega."

"You sent me there."

"For the crime of murder."

"But I didn't commit the crime!" Barrent said. "I didn't do it, and you must have known it."

"Of course I knew it," the robot-confessor said. "But my powers and duties are strictly defined. I sentence according to

evidence, not intuition. By law, the robot-confessors must weigh only the concrete evidence which is put before them. They must, when in doubt, sentence. In fact, the mere presence of a man before me charged with murder must be taken as a strong presumption of his guilt."

"Was there evidence against me?"

"Yes."

"Who gave it?"

"I cannot reveal his name."

"You must!" Barrent said. "Times are changing on Earth. The prisoners are coming back. Did you know that?"

"I expected it," the robot-confessor said.

"I must have the informer's name," Barrent said. He took the needlebeam out of his pocket and advanced toward the panel.

"A machine cannot be coerced," the robot-confessor told him.

"Give me the name!" Barrent shouted.

"I should not, for your own good. The danger would be too great. Believe me, Will..."

"The name!"

"Very well. You will find the informer at Thirty-five Maple Street. But I earnestly advise you not to go there. You will be killed. You simply do not know—"

Barrent raised his gun and pressed the trigger, and the narrow beam scythed through the

panel. Lights flashed and faded as he cut through the intricate wiring. At last all the lights were dead, and a faint gray smoke came from the panel.

Barrent left the booth. He put the needlebeam back in his pocket and walked to Maple Street.

He had been here before. He knew this street, set upon a hill, rising steeply between oak and maple trees. Those lampposts were old friends, that crack in the pavement was an ancient landmark. Here were the houses, heavy with familiarity. They seemed to lean expectantly toward him, like spectators waiting for the final act of an almost forgotten drama.

He stood in front of Thirty-five Maple Street. The silence which surrounded that plain white-shuttered house struck him as ominous. He took the needlebeam out of his pocket, looking for a reassurance he knew he could not find. Then he walked up the neat flagstones and tried the front door. It opened. He stepped inside.

He made out the dim shapes of lamps and furniture, the dull gleam of a painting on the wall, a piece of statuary on an ebony pedestal. Needlebeam in hand, he stepped into the next room.

And came face to face with the informer.

Staring at the informer's face,

Barrent remembered. In an overpowering flood of memory he saw himself, a little boy, entering the closed schoolroom. He heard again the soothing hum of machinery, watched the pretty lights blink and flash, and heard the insinuating machine voice whisper in his ear. At first, the voice filled him with horror; what it suggested was unthinkable. Then, slowly, he became accustomed to it, and accustomed to all the strange things that happened in the closed schoolroom.

He *learned*. The machines taught on deep, unconscious levels. The machines intertwined their lessons with the basic drives, weaving a pattern of learned behavior with the life instinct. They taught, then blocked off conscious knowledge of the lessons, sealed it—and fused it.

What had he been taught? *For the social good, you must be your own policeman and witness. You must assume responsibility for any crime which might conceivably be yours.*

The face of the informer stared impassively at him. It was Barrent's own face, reflected back from a mirror on the wall.

He had informed on himself. Standing with the gun in his hand that day, looking down at the murdered man, learned unconscious processes had taken over. The presumption of guilt

had been too great for him to resist, the similarity to guilt had turned into guilt itself. He had walked to the robot-confessor's booth, and there he had given complete and damning evidence against himself, had indicted himself on the basis of probability.

The robot-confessor had passed the obligatory sentence, and Barrent had left the booth. Well-trained in the lessons of the classroom, he had taken himself into custody, had gone to the nearest thought-control center in Trenton. Already a partial amnesia had taken place, keyed and triggered by the lessons of the closed classroom.

The skilled android technicians in the thought-control center had labored hard to complete this amnesia, to obliterate any remnants of memory. As a standard safeguard against any possible recovering of his memory, they had implanted a logical construct of his crime beneath the conscious level. As the regulations required, this construct contained an implication of the far-reaching power of Earth.

When the job was completed, an automatized Barrent had marched out of the center, taken a special expressway to the prison ship depot, boarded the prison ship, entered his cell, and closed the door and Earth behind him.

Then he had slept until the checkpoint had been passed, and the guards awakened the prisoners for disembarkation on Omega . . .

Now, staring at his own face in the mirror, the last of the unconscious lessons of the classroom became conscious:

*The lessons of the closed classroom must never be consciously known by the individual. If they become conscious, the human organism must perform an immediate act of self-destruction.*

Learned behavioral patterns intertwined with the basic life drive forced Barrent to raise the needlebeam, to point it toward his head. This was what the robot-confessor had tried to warn him about, and what the mutant girl had skrenned. The younger Barrent, conditioned to absolute and mindless conformity, had to kill himself.

The older Barrent who had spent time on Omega fought that blind urge. A schizophrenic Barrent fought himself. The two parts of him battled for possession of the gun, for control of the body, for ownership of the mind.

The gun's movement stopped inches from his head. The muzzle wavered. Then slowly, the new Omegan Barrent, Barrent<sub>2</sub>, forced the gun away.

His victory was short-lived. For now the lessons of the closed

classroom took over, forcing Barrent<sub>2</sub> into a contra-survival situation with the implacable and death-desiring product of conditioning, Barrent<sub>1</sub>.

## CHAPTER 30

CONDITIONING took over and flung the fighting Barrents backward through subjective time, to those stress-points in the past where death had been near, where the temporal life fabric had been weakened, where a predisposition toward death had already been established. Conditioning forced Barrent<sub>2</sub> to re-experience those moments. But this time, the danger was augmented by the full force of the malignant half of his personality—by the murderous informer, Barrent<sub>1</sub>.

Barrent<sub>2</sub> stood under glaring lights on the bloodstained sands of the Arena, a sword in his hand. It was the time of the Omegan Games. Coming at him was the Saunus, a heavily armored reptile with the leering face of Barrent<sub>1</sub>. Barrent<sub>2</sub> severed the creature's tail, and it changed into three trichome-treds rat-sized, Barrent-faced, with the dispositions of rabid wolverines. He killed two, and the third grinned and bit his left hand to the bone. He killed it, and watched Barrent<sub>1</sub>'s blood leak into the soggy sand . . .

Three ragged men sat laughing on a bench, and a girl handed him a small gun. "Good luck," she said, "I hope you know how to use this." Barrent nodded his thanks before he noticed that the girl was not Moera; she was the skrenning mutant who had predicted his death. Still, he moved into the street and faced the three Hadjis.

Two of the men were mild-faced strangers. The third, Barrent, stepped forward and quickly brought his gun into firing position. Barrent, flung himself to the ground and pressed the trigger of his unfamiliar weapon. He felt it vibrate in his hand and saw Hadji Barrent's head and shoulders turn black and begin to crumble. Before he could take aim again, his gun was wrenched violently from his hand. Barrent's dying shot had creased the end of the muzzle.

Desperately he dived for the gun, and as he rolled toward it he saw the second man, now wearing the Barrent, face, take careful aim. Barrent, felt pain flash through his arm, already torn by the trichometred's teeth. He managed to shoot this Barrent, and through a haze of pain face the third man, now also Barrent,. His arm was stiffening rapidly, but he forced himself to press the trigger . . .

*You're playing their game,*

Barrent, told himself. *The death-conditioning will wear you down, will kill you. You must see through it, get past it. It isn't really happening, it's in your mind . . .*

But there was no time to think about that. He was in a large, circular, high-ceilinged room of stone in the cellars of the Department of Justice. It was the Trial by Ordeal. Rolling across the floor toward him was a glistening black machine shaped like a half-sphere, standing almost four feet high. It came at him, and in the pattern of red, green and amber lights he could see the hated face of Barrent,.

Now his enemy was in its ultimate form: the invariant robot consciousness, as false and stylized as the conditioned dreams of Earth. The Barrent, machine extruded a single slender tentacle with a white light winking at the end of it. As it approached the tentacle withdrew, and in its place appeared a jointed metal arm ending in a knife-edge. Barrent, dodged, and heard the knife scrape against stone.

*It isn't what you think it is, Barrent, told himself. It isn't a machine, and you are not back on Omega. This is only half of yourself you are fighting, this is nothing but a deadly illusion.*

But he couldn't believe it. The Barrent machine was coming at him again, its metal hide glisten-

ing with a foul green substance which Barrent recognized immediately as Contact Poison. He broke into a sprint, trying to stay away from the fatal touch.

*It isn't fatal, he told himself.*

Neutralizer washed over the metal surface, clearing away the poison. The machine tried to ram him. Barrent tried half-heartedly to push it aside. It crashed into him with stunning force, and he could feel ribs splintering.

*It isn't real! You're letting a conditioned reflex talk you to death! You aren't on Omega! You're on Earth, in your own home, staring into a damned mirror!*

But the pain was real, and the clubbed metal arm felt real as it crashed against his shoulder. Barrent staggered away.

He felt horror, not at dying, but at dying too soon, before he could warn the Omegans of this ultimate danger planted deep in their own minds. There was no one else to warn them of the catastrophe that would strike when they recovered their memories of Earth. To his best knowledge, no one had experienced this and lived. If he could live through it, counter-measures

could be taken, counter-conditioning could be set up.

He pulled himself to his feet. Coached since childhood in social responsibility, he thought of it now. He couldn't allow himself to die when his knowledge was vital to Omega.

*That is not a real machine.*

He repeated it to himself as the Barrent machine revved up, picked up speed and hurtled toward him from the far side of the room. He forced himself to see beyond the machine, to see the patient droning lessons of the classroom which had created this monster in his mind.

*This is not a real machine.*

He believed it . . .

And swung his face into the hated face reflected in the metal.

There was a moment of dazzling pain, and then he lost consciousness. When he came to, he was alone in his own house on Earth. His arm and shoulder ached, and several of his ribs seemed to be broken. On his left hand he bore the stigmata of the trichometred's bite.

But with his cut and bleeding right hand he had smashed the mirror, shattering it and Barrent, utterly and forever.

THE END

# the Spectroscope

by S. E. COTTS

STRANGE RELATIONS. *By Philip Jose Farmer. 190 pp. Ballantine Books. Paper: 35¢.*

This is another example of Ballantine's enterprise in bringing together stories first printed in widely varied sources. But this reviewer pleads guilty to growing dissatisfaction with this practice, necessary though it may be. Fans who read science fiction widely will find that many current paperbacks contain material they have read elsewhere. Few things compare with the irritation of picking up what appears to be a brand new book only to find it contains old stories.

This tirade over, let me hasten to say that if we must have this duplication, Mr. Farmer certainly merits it. Each story deals with the interrelation between a Terran and a strange person or thing or animal on another world. Freud would have had a field day analyzing this book, not only because of the unique plots, but because it features the most suggestive prose this side of Venus. Whether Mr. Farmer is describing the stew-stomach of an alien Mother or the reproductive system of the larva-carrying Eeltau, his style conjures up not just the picture, but the 3-D picture complete with taste and smell, the whole vicarious experience of what he is describing. In the process he will probably revolt a large number of his readers. I say this not because I feel a reader should be insulted against the odd characteristics of alien races, but because the preponderance of this kind of description seems more for shock value than for anything else.

I won't deny that the author is a virtuoso in his way, but really

fine writing contains many colors, not just one. And if he feels he must confine himself to one, it seems unfortunate that he should choose to make it mustard brown.

THE UNEXPECTED DIMENSION. *By Algis Budrys. 159 pp. Ballantine Books. Paper: 35¢.*

Algis Budrys' very special way of telling a story shows to good advantage in this collection. Here again, though, there is the legitimate gripe that all the material has appeared recently in various S-F magazines. However, there is no griping about the quality of the author's work.

Whether he is putting his own flourishes on the old "back in time" gimmick, as in "The End of Summer" or blazing a newer trail, as in "The Executioner," he gives the reader something that has immediate impact, and yet is thought-provoking enough to stay in the mind long after each story is finished. This is some trick to accomplish! Any reader who doubts it should try it himself.

EIGHT KEYS TO EDEN. *By Mark Clifton. 187 pp. Doubleday & Company, Inc. \$2.95.*

This book comes very close to being exciting, so it is with a sense of disappointment that I have to say it just doesn't make the grade. I say "disappointment" because everything seems to predict the success of the book. The binding, the original cover painting, the nice typesetting—all are done with Doubleday's careful hand. As for the story itself, the author sets the stage very temptingly with interesting characters and an interesting situation. But there is a point about halfway through where the author starts trying to explain what mysterious forces are really behind the puzzling happenings on the Earth colony, Eden. And here he falls down terribly. Even assuming that he has a worthwhile explanation, you cannot just stop what started out as a regular narrative and plop this explanation down as the last half of the book. Once you start as a narrative, other things must be so well integrated that the patches don't show. But even this fault might be pardoned to some extent if the explanation were really worth one's attention. Mr. Clifton tries to present a rationale for the whole scheme of existence from the Creation to the Greeks to Jesus, etc. This is a job to tax an Arthur Clarke, but Mr. Clifton has neither Clarke's gift of poetry nor his sense of philosophy, and, unfortunately, this is a place where good intentions and good craftsmanship don't nearly suffice.



## Or so you say

Dear Editor:

Just had to write in and compliment you on your fine July issue. It was really star-studded!

First place must go to Blish's colorful novel. It seems as though it was shortened for the magazine. It was a real surprise after that Galactic shoot-'em-up by Kelleam. Also glad to see a serial. I like two-parters, and it gives the chance for novelets to appear.

As for Page's remark about Summers hiding behind the pen names Varga, and Grayam—Grayam is much more than a thicker drawing pencil. But Varga's work does resemble Summers work to a degree.

Why not give at least another full page to Cotts for his books?

After your one comment saying more illos and uniform type are coming, and the coming next month saying a novel is coming from Sheckley, I'm looking forward to great improvement for *Amazing*.

William R. Schnicke  
4 Naomi Drive, R.R.1  
Milford, Ohio

• *There will indeed be continued improvement in Amazing. Let me remind you again—if you haven't read or heard already—that next month's Amazing—the October issue—will be the first in a brand-new format.*

Dear Editor:

I'd like to go on record as stating that I definitely am in agreement with the views expressed by Redd Boggs and David Greenman in the July issue concerning Ward Moore's excellent "Transient." As far as I can see, the one reason contributing most towards a dislike of this novel, as were some of the reactions expressed, stems from the fact that Ziff-Davis has printed so much material of below average quality, that a superlative novel like Mr. Moore's is not recognized at once for its true value, but merely for its strangeness, and the way it's unlike other stories. Robert Heinlein's "Starship Soldiers" in *F&SF* created another row, similar to this, yet received wide acclaim from many sources

though severe denunciation too.

On the other hand, Moore's "Transient" definitely is of a higher class than the usual stuff printed in *Amazing* or *Fantastic*. Being rather active in the fan-world, I can assure you that publication of "Transient" has created quite a stir, and there have been several critical essays of it written, and much arguing back and forth as to its true meaning. I predict that it will be one of the novels nominated for a Hugo (the annual award for the best stories and other items, given at the annual science fiction convention) next year, and may even have a very good chance of winning the award.

I hope the publication of "Transient" will indicate an upswing in the quality of material that the Ziff-Davis magazines have been dispensing. The quality has risen since the novel-an-issue policy was instituted, but there is still room for improvement. I hope you will not see fit to publish one "burst" and pad out the remainder of the year with "duds."

Mike Deckinger  
85 Locust Ave.  
Millburn, N. J.

• *It's nice to think that "Transient" would be considered for a Hugo. May I make a suggestion to any convention chair-*

*man who might be listening? Since the Moore novel has stirred up so much furor over its meaning, why not invite Ward Moore to be a convention speaker and tell us all what he really meant.*

Dear Editor:

*Amazing* is undoubtedly improving, as only a glance at the letter column will show. The readers seem to be much more interested in your policies, the type of stories that you print, how the magazine looks, etc. The stories are much better—look at all the controversy they spark. When any story comes out that causes some people to proclaim it a masterpiece and others to say it stinks, this is one story I personally wouldn't want to pass by.

The departments, excluding the editorials are getting larger too. The letter columns have been running up to seven and eight pages in the last two issues, and, still more *Amazing*, S. E. Cotts actually reviewed four books, even if the fourth one was a book for eight to twelve-year-olds.

If you continue to buy and publish stories like "... And All the Stars a Stage" you'll take a Hugo yet. I think that this is perhaps the best novel I've read in *Amazing* since "Collision Course" back in July, '59. I won't say that this novel is the best

that Blish has ever written because it isn't, but it's definitely a milestone for the current *Amazing*.

The covers are improved, but not enough to make a big difference. And the cover on the July issue looked like a block print. Instead of introducing a lot of new artists why don't you introduce a few old ones that have talent?

David B. Williams  
714 Dale St.  
Normal, Ill.

● *I like your point about controversy, but I want to make it clear that we don't print stories just for the sake of controversy. First they must be—in our opinion—good stories. If they then stir up controversy, so much the better.*

Dear Editor:

You don't know me, but among my colleagues I am considered a bit of a science-fiction expert. Speaking in such capacity, I would like to inform you that your June issue of *Amazing* bordered on the decrepit. The only half-decent thing in it was the first half of ". . . And All The Stars A Stage" by Blish, which was well written. But even that was a mite commonplace, and I already know what's going to happen. (However I won't tell, because it might ruin it for the

bubble-brained fans of this magazine.)

The only other thing in the issue that didn't disgust me to the core was "The Bald-Headed Mirage" by Robert Bloch. It only went as far as the outer part of my liver. I wouldn't let it get any further.

All in all I suggest that you quit buying stories from twelve-year-old Mongolian idiots (no offense to Mr. Bloch of course), and buy some decent stories by Sharkey, Asimov, or Simak. If this letter has gotten too close to the vital truth, don't print it. I've got better things to do than write to obscure science fiction magazines anyway.

Charles Jensen  
231 10th St.  
Beach Haven, N. J.

● *You don't know me, but among my colleagues I am considered a bit of a science fiction expert. And I disagree with you completely. You know what that proves? It proves all experts are twelve-year-old Mongolian idiots (no offense, of course).*

Dear Editor:

Your magazine gets better every month! The June issue is the best I've seen since I started reading *Amazing*. I realize that this does not sound a bit like the letter that I wrote to you which appeared in the current issue,

however, I was sick the night I wrote it (sick in the head). In fact, as a result of the letter being printed, I was so happy that I took out a subscription to *Amazing*. I don't intend to miss a single issue from now on.

One change for the better which I noted in the June issue was the dividing of James Blish's "... And All The Stars A Stage" into a serial. This leaves more room for other stories. Bob Bloch's "The Bald-Headed Mirage" was without a doubt the best interplanetary "horror" story I've seen in a long time. John Brudy's "If At First You Don't . . ." was the second best story. The others were pretty good.

Scott Neilsen

731 Brookridge Dr.

Webster Groves 19, Mo.

Dear Editor:

I have almost given up hope of ever having a letter printed in your magazine, but I am going to keep writing until I do. So if you don't want to be bothered by me any more, you'd better print this letter, see?

Now to get down to what I have to say. In the first place, I think that *Amazing* is the best s-f magazine on the market, and I'm willing to argue the fact with anyone who writes to me.

To comment on recent issues: June was pretty good. I haven't

read "... And All The Stars A Stage" yet because I'd rather wait until I have both parts, although it looks very promising. Robert Bloch's story was excellent, as what Bloch story isn't. I can't say enough about the cover. It's the best one so far this year and better than any cover last year.

The May issue was the worst this year. Neither of the short stories were particularly good, and Kelleam's novel was the best example of pure tripe I have ever seen. It had about enough plot for ten pages.

I missed not having a novel in the April issue, but it was a lot better than some issues with novels. "We're Friends Now" was the best story I have ever read in *Amazing*. I had never heard of Henry Hasse before, but now I am ready for more from him. "The Red Telephone" was excellent too. These two stories were worth the price of the magazine.

Someone wrote in the June issue that they didn't understand the pun on the title of "The Spectroscope.. I think I understand: it's so short that it's only a speck in the magazine. Get it?

Michael Padgett

3230 Washington Road

Martinez, Georgia

● *We're fortunate to have*

Bloch appear in our pages, for that boy is mighty busy these days. He is a regular contributor to a network television show, has a new novel coming out, and the movie based on his book "Psycho" is currently showing all over America. And now that we've printed your letter we don't have to be bothered by you anymore, right?

Dear Editor:

I have the dubious pleasure of receiving *Amazing Science Fiction Stories* and *Fantastic Science Fiction Stories* each month secondhand from a neighbor. (It is not worth the 2.8 bits that it costs). In the three years that this arrangement has been in effect, I have yet to read one story (or "novel" or novelette or editorial or article or book review) that is even the least bit entertaining. Each issue brings forth more revolting tripe than the preceding one. However, I continue reading (for free, I reiterate) in the dwindling hope that someday you will print something which is almost readable.


I have been on the verge of penning this note for the past year or so but after reading the June issue of *Amazing*, I was horrified by the general incompetence of authors, editors, and book reviewer that I felt compelled to vent my spleen at last.

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The short stories were, as usual, yawn-provokers. The worst offender was "MacApp" who was obviously afraid to sign his real name to that "Tulan" farce.

Blish, an excellent author under normal conditions, seems to turn slightly sour whenever he hits the pages of a Ziff-Davis publication. I notice that Signet Books, a firm remarkably inept at finding good science fiction, is reprinting his atrocity. I wish them luck and hope they manage to break even.

I was astonished to see that S. E. Cotts finally did something worthwhile in his column—He omitted a third book review. However, the first two were in their usual assinine style, offering only the thinnest of criticism and concluding with the customary word of praise.

Of special interest was your editorial, concerning mosquitoes, which was definitely on the mosquito level.

The art work—especially the typically sickening Summers cover—was up to par, that is to say, terrible. The revolting interior illustrations are worthy of a demented chimpanzee.

I challenge you to print this letter among the repulsive gurgles of delight which pervade the pages of the letter columns in *Amazing* and *Fantastic*!

To sum up, *Amazing Stories*

for June was an absolute horror and a total loss. You would do well to publish material of one-tenth the quality of that found in any issue of *Astounding* (*Analog*) *Science Fiction*.

R. Wolf Goldberg

64-27A 224th St.

Bayside 64, N. Y.

● *We all hope you feel better now, and that life will smile on you soon. Please give our deepest sympathy to your neighbor.*

Dear Editor:

The conclusion to Blish's "... And All The Stars A Stage" was well worth waiting for and quite up to my expectations. The author is to be complimented on writing such an excellent tale, and you for obtaining it from him. May I also say thanks for making sure the novels are really novel length by stretching them into two or more issues.

Your editorial was, as always much too short. Why not enlarge it a few pages? Surely you've got more to say than you have been. A longer editorial wouldn't knock the format that much out of wack, and I enjoy reading what you have to say.

"Noble Redman" was fair; "L is for Lash" was a little better. Varga illoing again, or is it really Summers as Jerry Page states in the letter column? Bunch's

story was fair; "Membership Drive" was cute, but who is Murray F. Yaco? And Grayam? Clarke's article was good, I must admit, but then he is one Britisher who always seems to be nothing else but. Only trouble—the piece was much too short and the subject matter could be greatly enlarged upon.

Ehh! That's for the book review column. Worse than ever. I'd much rather have Knight, even with his stinging remarks of displeasure (or is it of pain) than S. E. Cotts, whoever he is, really, that is! Can't he be more objective, perspective, enjoyable, (?) etc.

The letters, I think, were the most delight-giving items in this issue. I'm glad some finally stepped forward in defense of Ward Moore's "Transient." Do you know, by any freak of chance if the Red Boggs of the first letter is the same zine editor "Boggs. of yesteryear fame?

Tell Lenny Kaye that "anybody will correspond with him, if he's so dern lonely. Also, as he seems to be interested in zines, tell him that he (and other fans) are *desperately* needed! That is to say, I'd like to publish my own zine, *Inertia* but I need interested fans to write letters (also stories, articles, review columns and do art work). There's plenty to be done.

Seems that every new *Amaz-*



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A

ing fan has ideas, and this in reference to Alan Lacrosse. May I say, Al, welcome to the club!

B. Joseph Fekete, Jr.  
212 Cooley Road  
RFD #2  
Grafton, Ohio.

● *Point 1: So many readers have been asking for longer editorials we're about ready to shuck false modesty and cut loose. Buy our next (October) issue and read old long-winded Lobsenz. Point 2: I always thought, in my old-fashioned way, that book reviews should be subjective, not objective.*

Dear Editor:

In answer to David E. Glidden, the issue is May '58, and the stories are the same.

Rose Harper, Edward F. Schmidt, Edgar Miller, go soak your various and sundry heads. If "Macbeth" was discovered yesterday and just published you would call it sadistic! Asimov and Heinlein should excommunicate you forthwith.

I was very disappointed in the May '60 issue. I don't care to spend 35¢ just to read one good story and a bunch of trite horse opera (or space opera as the case may be).

"Hunters Out of Space" was, it seemed to me, transposed word for word from the 1903 edition of The School Boy's Adventure Book. Kelleam would feel more

at home in the 19th Century, judging from his choice of adjectives and phrasing.

"No Moving Parts,"—not a story but a prediction—excellent.

"The Still Small Voice" was trite. Period. "Longevity"—ditto.

One thing and one only will keep me buying your magazine: you have stopped printing those immensely interesting scientific articles such as: "The Quidor-tant Treatise on Magazine Binding Glue."

I just finished reading a very funny article about life on other planets by a very well known science fact writer. What people seem to forget is: why can't life base itself on copper or iron instead of carbon? Because the possibility of that being the case is very great. Anybody else have any theories or ideas?

You probably know this next question by heart but, more illustrations please? Maybe some by Emsh and Freas?

Phil Freedman

3910 Coco Ave.

Los Angeles 8, Calif.

● *I'm glad we got your letter when we did, because we had just scheduled a fact piece on magazine glue. Although we thought it was quite interesting, we always accede to the readers' opinion, and so we have yanked that article from this issue. In its place we are printing your letter.*

(Continued from page 5)

who is making a long-awaited return to science-fiction. The "you are there" quality of his draughtsmanship is as spectacular as ever. (Future issues of the new *Amazing* will also feature covers by the veterans Emsh and Valigursky, for example.)

As far as stories are concerned, we are determined not only to maintain but to raise the standards of our fiction. For instance, the October *Amazing* will feature a brilliant novella by Clifford Simak written especially for us.

And because the speed of the changes in the world around us is making it difficult even for science-fiction to keep up with factual events, we are inaugurating a new series of interesting and readable science-fact articles. The first, by Lester Del Rey, points out how we can start colonizing Venus now.

Other aspects of the restyled *Amazing* will include an expanded letters column, longer editorials, twice as many book reviews as heretofore, more inside artwork, and a new and easier-to-read paper.

In many respects all this may seem to be the end of one era and the beginning of another. But I hesitate to make any "end-of-an-era" claims about as redoubtable a magazine as *Amazing*. From the day when

Mr. Gernsback (see p. 22) turned the gleam in his eye into an actuality until the present, *Amazing* has been through many so-called "eras": all kinds of cover styles, all kinds of story policies, all kinds of editors. (It even survived the Shaver Mystery.) As the current inheritor of this tradition of vitality, I prefer to think of the forthcoming changes as new signs of *Amazing's* vigor—as a continuation of its willingness to experiment in order to bring the best of science-fiction to its loyal readership. (And I can promise that the change is no one-shot affair; for, as you will read in next month's editorial column, there is still more in store.)

I hope you will read and study the new *Amazing* carefully. I hope that after you have done this you will write and let me know what you think of it.—NL





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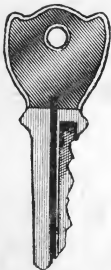
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